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ABSTRACT

Most of the research on women and vocational education and training (VET) in Australia and elsewhere that was published in 1987-1998 may be characterized as follows: (1) it was undertaken to inform or support policy decisions and is therefore framed by political and ideological agendas; (2) it is piecemeal; (3) it tends to consider women as "other" while normalizing the experiences of men; and (4) it lacks a perspective of "advantage" as opposed to "disadvantage." The literature on women and VET revolves around the following themes: (1) globalization and change; (2) social, cultural, and demographic changes; (3) policies, politics, and VET; (4) marketization of VET; (5) economic and social policies and practices for VET; (6) gender issues in VET; and (7) curriculum, pedagogies, and practices in VET. The literature on all these themes reveals a consistency in research findings and recommendations that seek structural systemic change in the VET system, including the political will to position equity as a central organizing feature. A scheme providing research grants for VET operating like the grants awarded by the Australian Research Council should be established. Grants should promote a vigorous, knowledge-seeking and inclusive culture in VET. (Fourteen tables/figures are included. The bibliography lists 279 references.) (MN)

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'Don't be too polite, girls!'

Women, work and vocational education and training: a critical review of the literature

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Women, work and vocational education and training: a critical review of the literature

Elaine Butler

Fran Ferrier

NCVER

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Elaine Butler
Fran Ferrier

Contents

Acknowledgements ___ *iii*

Contents ___ *v*

Executive summary ___ *vii*

Overview of the literature ___ **vii**

What the literature tells us about women, work and VET ___ **vii**

Where to from here? ___ **viii**

Proposals for action ___ **x**

Introduction ___ *1*

Purpose ___ **1**

Investigating women and VET: Approaches, understandings and boundaries ___ **2**

Investigating 'women' ___ 2

Investigating VET ___ 2

The literature ___ 4

Framework for the report ___ **6**

Naming the report ___ 6

Structure of the report ___ 7

SECTION 1

Locating VET: Contexts and controversies ___ *8*

Overview ___ **8**

The political landscape: Economic reforms and social trends ___ 8

Key themes and issues ___ **10**

Economic reforms ___ 10

Social trends ___ 17

Women, work and not-so-'new' times ___ 22

Challenges ___ **31**

SECTION 2

At the margins of the narrative: Women and the culture and history of VET ___ *35*

Introduction ___ **35**

Overview ___ **35**

VET enrolments 1996 ___ 38

Barriers to women's access and participation ___ 40

Women and work-based training ___ 42

Women and ACE ___ 45

Women in VET courses ___ 47

Women and private training organisations ___ 48

Key themes and issues ___ **49**

From 'technical education' to TAFE and VET: A masculine culture ___ 49

An uncertain future ___ 56

Challenges ___ **58**

SECTION 3

Women, equity and VET: Rhetoric, readings and realities ____ ***60***

Overview ____ **60**

Key themes and issues ____ **61**
Social justice and vocational education ____ 61
Social justice, equity and vocational education ____ 62
Approaches to equity ____ 65
Target groups and category politics ____ 66
The politics of advantage—the missing perspective ____ 70
Readings of equity in vocational education and training discourse ____ 71
Equity for women and girls in the broader domain of education ____ 73

Challenges ____ **79**

SECTION 4

Disciplining difference: Policy research findings and 'gaps' ____ ***81***

Thinking about policy ____ **81**

Mapping policy ____ **82**

Conclusion: Research findings and gaps ____ **89**
Themes ____ 91
In conclusion ____ 93

Endnotes ____ ***94***

References ____ ***95***

Tables

Table 1.1: Government outlays on TAFE ____ *17*
Table 1.2: Dimensions of globalisation ____ *17*
Table 1.3: Educational participation rates of 17–19-year-olds (per cent) ____ *21*
Table 1.4: Labour force characteristics—February 1997 ____ *26*
Table 1.5: Full- and part-time employment—February 1997 ____ *26*
Table 1.6: Part-time workers ('000): whether preferred to work more hours—February 1997 ____ *27*
Table 1.7: Employed persons by occupation—February 1997 ____ *27*
Table 1.8: Employed persons by industry—February 1997 ____ *28*
Table 1.9: References to globalisation and women, selected databases ____ *32*
Table 2.1: All VET clients as at 30 June 1996 ____ *38*
Table 2.2: Module enrolments ('000) in personal enrichment programs by discipline group and sex ____ *39*
Table 2.3: Vocational education and training clients, streams 2100–4500, 1996 ____ *39*

Figures

Figure 1: Australian vocational education and training 1991–99 ____ *87*
Figure 2: Equity policy performance matrix for Australian vocational education and training 1991–99 ____ *88*

Executive summary

Overview of the literature

The literature relating to women and vocational education and training (VET) generated over the last decade (1987–mid-1998) is extensive. It is drawn from many different academic disciplines, from both within Australia and from overseas. It includes the work of individuals, research teams, diverse community groups and government and non-government organisations. It concerns women from a wide variety of backgrounds.

The literature reviewed both shapes and indicates a substantial body of knowledge in relation to women and VET. However, much remains unpublished, obscures authors' names, and is difficult to locate. The difficulties associated with ready access to literature in the latter category limits its potential as a resource for policy-making and strategy-planning.

The literature reveals considerable research activity concerning women and VET. It is noted that equity-related research is not accorded the same significance as so-called 'mainstream' research in VET. While it can be argued that equity-related research has resulted in a positive impact on localised pedagogical and practice issues for women, there is little evidence of significant policy or structural systemic outcomes. Most equity research is funded from government-related sources. Most often, this research:

- is undertaken to inform or support policy decisions and therefore is driven and framed by political and ideological agendas. As such, it has been more reactive than proactive
- is piecemeal, so that it is difficult to assemble a comprehensive picture of change
- tends to consider women as 'other', while normalising the experiences of men
- lacks a perspective of 'advantage' as opposed to 'disadvantage'

What the literature tells us about women, work and VET

A full understanding of the impact and implications of social and economic change on, and for VET would benefit significantly from attention to women, for:

> *Women's experiences are a mirror to the future. Women experience first hand the extent to which the current institutional framework—including labour market structures and the social infrastructure—has failed to keep pace with the changing technological, economic, social and political realities* (OECD 1994, p.13).

Women have clearly articulated what they want from VET. Women's goals recognise both the 'education' and the 'training' aspects of VET and often reflect a lifelong learning focus. Since they comprise half the population, women are not content with being second-best, but seek acknowledgement as legitimate clients whose needs are considered equal to those of advantaged groups. This means ceasing to make 'arrangements for young men and then making unsatisfactory running repairs to the system to accommodate women and other equity groups' (Connole 1997, p.1).

The business of equity has never been central to the 'real' business of VET. There is little understanding of what equity means at a national level and there is a reluctance among policy-makers to act on recommendations of equity-related research which call for structural or systemic changes that would see equity become a central organising principle within the VET system.

Aggregated participation data for the VET sector indicating that women's participation in VET has improved in the past decade hide many continuing problems, including clustering in fields of study and at lower levels, less employer support for external training, under-representation and low completion rates in apprenticeships in non-traditional areas and lower retention rates in traineeships in group training companies.

These problems, and the stronger preference by women than men for VET courses in the 'personal enrichment stream' are partially explained by qualitative data indicating that women in VET continue to experience a highly gendered culture that fails to take adequate account of the complexity of their lives and experiences and to recognise their commitment to employment. Particularly in non-traditional areas, women continue to have to deal with unacceptable and inappropriate behaviour from employers, students and teaching staff. In addition, some of their difficulties have been compounded rather than ameliorated by reforms to, and in VET, such as 'flexibility', which disadvantages some women by giving a higher priority to prioritising the needs of industries and enterprises. Even in the female-dominated Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector, specific strategies to meet the needs of particular groups of women receive low priority or follow-through.

Diminishing commitment to equity in the contemporary marketised VET system will continue to present even greater challenges, including that, in an environment increasingly dominated by 'user-pays', women's lower-level incomes will inevitably wind back the small participation gains observed.

Where to from here?

The literature review reveals a consistency in research findings and recommendations that seek structural systemic change in the VET system, including the political will to position equity as a central organising feature. Such an endeavour is increasingly urgent for the development of a dynamic and rigorous VET system able to position itself proactively in times of rapid global change. Another necessary feature is that of consistent policy which links VET and other related economic and social policy areas.

Ongoing collaborative and participative effort, including that of effective research activities to shape an inclusive VET community and sector might be shaped around seven themes:

- *Globalisation and change*

  The changing nature, organisation and distribution of work; the 'feminisation' of work; interrelationships between global/local, labour market and vocational education and training implications for women; the 'imperative' of change in VET—a gender analysis; the continuation of enduring patterns of segregation and emerging new divisions; shifts in concepts of knowledges, skills and training for work for women; and the role of the state, and equity for women.

- *Social, cultural and demographic changes*

  The implications for, and impact on women and VET, of changes in the lives of women produced by political and cultural 'homogenisation'; ageing of workforces; the marginalisation of youth; changing work/family relationships; and changing patterns and locations of 'class'; the role of VET in creating social capital.

- *Policies, politics and VET*

  Changing shapes of institutions of the state, and implications for women and VET, including 'big picture' research of significance to women; the interrelationships between other sectors, disparate policies that need connecting (for example, industry policy, economic policy, social policies, industrial relations, rural and regional development); policy-making processes and outcomes within VET, including analyses that consider issues related to politics, privilege and power; the positioning of equity within VET (as in any of the other categories); and consultation that ensures a difference for women.

- *Marketisation of VET*

  Regulation/deregulation, and implications for women/equity groups; the interrelationships between markets and equity contracts; the implications of national 'market' policies and practices for local practices; feminist/women-friendly economics and VET; the relationships between accountability, measurement and equity; policy and practice accountability for women as clients of VET.

- *Economic and social policies and practices for VET*

  The role of women in economic and social development; the interplay between paid and unpaid work in the labour force and VET; VET, women and sustainable economic and social growth; compound disadvantage, women and VET; the interrelations between social, cultural and economic capital, women and VET; women, intellectual capital and VET; and futures for women in and through VET.

- *Gender issues in VET*

  Structural and systemic transformation of the institution of VET to inclusivity rather than exclusivity; a gender analysis of the structures and systems of VET bureaucracies; conceptual/policy frameworks for equity, women and VET; equity, difference/s and public goods in VET; the relationship between advantage and disadvantage; men and women; differences and diversity within VET; shifting to 'equity imperatives' as well as 'economic imperatives'; the shifting interrelationships between masculinities and femininities in VET; the relationships between VET for women and girls in schools, ACE, post-compulsory education and work; and men, masculinities and VET.

- *Curriculum, pedagogies and practices in VET*

  This continues as a significant area for ongoing, women-centred and feminist research, much of which has already established a significant 'baseline' for ongoing critical work.

Proposals for action

1. The establishment of a funded and accessible 'mainstream' collection point, archive and clearing house for research that covers the broad area of women and VET.

2. A major research project updating the comprehensive and informative work undertaken by Pocock (1987a, 1987b; 1988, 1992).

3. The establishment of a scheme providing untied research grants for VET operating in a similar fashion to the grants awarded by the Australian Research Council.

Introduction

Purpose

VET has a long history in Australia, as elsewhere. However, the 'official' history of women as active participants in VET and the relationship between women and VET in Australia is an unfolding story, much of which is located in contemporary times. This report, conducted under the auspices of the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) takes the form of a critical literature review focussing on the multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral arena encompassing the broad field of 'women and VET'.

To conjoin 'women and VET' suggests the existence of an authoritative body of knowledge that represents the field of study as an 'object'; in this case, a literature that is considered to speak for, and to practitioners and learners; policy-makers, planners and bureaucrats; the academy and many others who identify as 'stakeholders' in the area. This is not the case for 'women and VET'. As indicated above, the field is multi-disciplinary: it crosses a number of highly politicised and contested boundaries. Literatures around 'women' and 'VET', along with the closely related literatures of 'women and work' vary widely in their philosophical, historical and ideological approaches. They cover areas that individually encompass contextualised and theoretical sites marked, in the face of significant political, cultural and theoretical challenges by engagement in introspection, heated debate and continual transformation. For these reasons, this critical literature review does not purport to represent a definitive view of 'women and VET'. What it can do is indicate the breadth of the field, and highlight selected contemporary debates and challenges. It is this understanding that was influential in guiding the selection of literature within the set parameters of the research brief.

Specifically, the two major aims of this research were:

- to provide material useful to policy-makers and practitioners in planning responses appropriate to the nature and scope of women's disadvantage in VET
- to provide guidance to researchers and research funding bodies on gaps in the existing research and the direction of possible future research

The report also serves a related purpose—that of collating a selected body of literature from disparate fields of significance to the focus of 'women and VET'. It is hoped that the list of references will provide a useful resource for a wider audience with an interest in this field.

Investigating 'women'

Any investigation that focusses on 'women' *per se* runs the risk of being described as essentialist in its approach, especially if it attempts to position *all women* into a unitary category through the use of the one descriptor 'women'. Following extensive theorising, lively international debates and ever-emerging understandings and practices around concepts of women, gender and difference/s, we find ourselves in the ambiguous position of subscribing to 'new' feminist knowledges and the need for new forms of politics, while at the same time needing to work pragmatically, politically and sensitively (in ways that do not conceal differences) with the category 'women'—in the short term at least. Category 'women' encapsulates many differences between women; it also contains most other groups designated by nomenclature such as equity, disadvantaged, special needs or target populations. While this tension will be addressed briefly in the report, the limitations inherent in talking about or speaking on behalf of 'women' are acknowledged.

As implied in the wording of the first research aim of this project (see above), women are perceived as disadvantaged. This association of women and disadvantage mirrors the assumptions and ideologies inherent in the equity target group approach to women which is the basis of all equity policies and practices of VET. For these reasons, consideration of understandings of, and approaches to equity and especially equity as it relates to women in VET, are central to this report. This inclusion also necessitates consideration of the troubled and interrelated concepts of social justice, equality and equity, albeit briefly. Ideas and issues relating to equity that inform section 3 also influence the assumptions inherent in our broader critique of the literature.

Within the broad field of 'women and VET', the focus of this study is that of women as students and potential students in vocational education and training. This framing excludes both the women who work in VET and the literature relating to women as workers in VET. While accepting this limitation, we also wish to acknowledge the significance of the labour, whether paid or unpaid, contributed to VET by so many women, and especially those efforts undertaken primarily to benefit women as VET students. Indeed, 'women as workers in VET' is an area of research in its own right and is worthy of increased investigation.

Investigating VET

Vocational education and training is charged specifically with responsibility for vocational or work-related education and training for Australians. Over the last decade, vocational education and training has ascended to a pivotal position in national policy interest in Australia, as elsewhere. This ascendancy has been driven by an increasing belief in, and reliance on the ability of VET to contribute significantly to enhanced economic competitiveness by assuring that Australia has a skilled workforce. The significance of the period from the promulgation of Australia's National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) in 1987 until the present time (August 1998) has been utilised to establish the period for the literature included in the study. Throughout this period, VET has, and continues to experience radical reshaping at all levels of its activities. Despite this period of relentless change, vocational education and training is still often referred to in a way that frames it as a distinct, homogeneous and contained sector of education.

While VET is most often perceived as a 'sector' of education shaped by practice and pedagogy, we argue that VET is first an institution of the state. By focussing on the organisations and agencies of VET, it can also be viewed as a bureaucracy, with a set of structures and systems, history and culture/s. As an area of policy and practices, VET is complex, multi-faceted and ever-changing. The boundaries between the compulsory school sector and VET (as post-compulsory education) are weakening, with the establishment of VET in secondary schools. The boundaries between VET and adult community education (ACE) are blurring, resulting in attempts to re-articulate definitions of both and investigations into mutuality and differences in provision of VET and/or ACE . Similarly, many VET courses now articulate with, or are granted credit or advanced standing in university (higher) education awards in the ongoing pursuit of 'seamless' lifelong education. Given the scope of VET, this study provides a partial and selective analysis of aspects of VET considered especially relevant for women.

While VET was most often associated with trade-related courses delivered in technical and further education (TAFE) colleges, vocationally oriented education and training is very much wider in scope than the old apprenticeship model. However, when considering issues of gender, it is important to investigate implications of the masculinised culture associated with VET, and the mirroring of this culture with that in industry and workplaces. An increasing amount of workplace learning is now recognised formally as VET; indeed an ever increasing number of VET courses are delivered in workplaces by workplace trainers, utilising different ratios of on-the-job and off-the-job training strategies. Finally, learning that enhances work-related knowledge and skill-based performance at work but has been 'learned' in non-work settings can now be assessed as vocational competence.

To interrogate the literature relating to women and VET, it is necessary to draw on literature relating to work and women's position in the workforce, as well as to consider the relationship between learning for work (VET), work-related implications and outcomes, patterns of segregation and new challenges in an increasingly globalised world. This by inference also calls into question hegemonic understandings of popular framings of 'work' that are both ideological and deeply gendered. Such a view perceives 'work' as synonomous with employment—any activity (especially that of making things) in the public sphere, undertaken for financial compensation. The well-documented scenario of crises in work at the end of this millennium are highly significant for VET and also for women—in their relationships with VET, with the state, and their interest in possibilities for shaping sustainable local/global futures.

Finally, it is also necessary to consider the significant role that policy plays in this turbulent scenario: what policy approaches are called on; what is framed as a policy 'problem'; why and by whom? What have been the relationships between policy and research and the gender agendas for both? What are the politics of power inherent in policy discourses and the discursive practices of various policy actors; how and where is equity positioned in these events? Who has benefited; who has been marginalised or left out? How have equity advocates and women participated? Have they had the space and the political voice to actively shape policy, or have women's efforts and interests been directed to responding to policy 'requirements? What are the implications for women?

The literature

Approach

This study has interpreted 'literature' as written (English language) text. As this study is that of a critical literature review, the approach is analytical rather than descriptive. Thus the literature will neither be summarised, nor will annotations of articles be included. Rather, key themes and issues have been identified, competing views noted and assessed with the strength of arguments and evidence examined. The literature relevant to the topic is extensive. It is drawn from many different academic disciplines: from both within Australia and overseas; from diverse community groups and organisations including government and non-government organisations; it concerns women from a wide variety of backgrounds who may identify with any number of the equity category groups associated with systemic and policy approaches to VET in Australia. Much of the literature contains comment on the VET system, which in turn is reflected in this critique. Sources have been identified through a wide-ranging search utilising electronic data bases; selected library collections; bibliographies; other research reports; letters, telephone calls or electronic mail to key organisations, women's networks and groups, individuals both in Australia and elsewhere, and finally, utilising the authors' extensive professional and personal collections.

Boundaries

Given the multi-disciplinary scope of the field to be covered in this research and therefore the diversity of the literatures, it is not possible to include all relevant works within the boundaries of this study. In constructing the references for this study and drawing on the understandings discussed above, the following criteria were used to assist decision-making for selection of material deemed appropriate for inclusion:

- the work provides significant information for contextualising VET, work and women
- the work concerns VET, or the intersections of VET with employment, higher education, adult and community education and/or schooling
- the work addresses gender issues directly or indirectly, with the main emphasis on women
- the work explains or illustrates an approach, or approaches to policy
- the work originates in Australia or is relevant to, impacts on, or illuminates the Australian context
- the work concerns the period 1987–98, or is important in gaining an understanding of some aspect of this period

Although most of the works included in the references are published, some unpublished works have also been included. There are three reasons for this: firstly, to ensure that important contributions to the literature are not overlooked; secondly, to include works by community organisations and groups that may not be widely disseminated; and, thirdly, to include works which are outside the limited range often drawn on by academics and policy-makers.

Provided they meet the criteria described above, works in many different forms have been included; for instance, books, journals, monographs, articles, papers, newspapers, correspondence, legal documents, brochures, recordings and so on. One important

exclusion has been the many works which outline strategies or provide guidelines for implementation of programs, policies or procedures at State or local level. While not denying the practical significance of such works, these documents are numerous, often repetitive, and in general do not add to a greater understanding of issues concerning women and VET.

The identifying, collecting and collating of the literature for the references was hindered by three factors in particular:

- *Hidden authors.* There is a surprisingly large number of works that fail to indicate an author, or the name of the author/s is placed where it is difficult to find, making correct attribution and citation of such works problematic. Many such works are produced for committees, by government and non-government organisations and often are outcomes of funded research.

- *Hidden or inaccessible works.* Locating relevant literature, particularly relevant literature outside the limited range used most often by academics and policy advisers, is problematic. Many are not listed in appropriate data bases or located in libraries and are only found by careful scrutinising of reference lists or bibliographies, internet websites, or especially by word of mouth. In some cases, access to a particular work can only be achieved by a considerable financial outlay and so at times was not possible within the limited resources of this study. Post-graduate theses that provide in-depth analyses are extremely difficult to locate and access. Finally, much valuable commissioned work (including research funded by public moneys) is often not released beyond a very small number of individuals or is embargoed for various reasons (including controversial findings).

- *Gaps in the literature.* Important gaps have emerged as a result of the search and analysis, along with the implications of such gaps. This factor is discussed further in the report, in relevant sections including areas for future research. While not a 'gap' *per se*, it is also important to acknowledge that much of the history of women and VET in this country is still in the form of undocumented oral histories; that is, there are very many women who are the embodied holders of important local knowledges of a breadth of events, struggles and issues that may never be recorded as 'literature'. There is also a smaller number of women with extensive and in-depth personal and practical knowledge that could inform a national record and interpretation of women and VET in Australia, both prior to, and especially for the period since the Kangan report (Australian Committee on Technical and Further Education 1975). It is our sincere hope that some mechanism/s and resources are allocated to documenting this critical history, to ensure that such important knowledges do not become permanently fixed as 'gaps in the literature'.

Scope

The works included in the references can be categorised in any number of different ways, for differing purposes. As work on the study progressed, they were classified according to the main theme, function or purpose, within the framework described below:

- *Research studies.* These works are investigations of questions or a series of questions. For instance they include (but are not limited to) investigations of the nature, scope and causes of women's disadvantage; of barriers to access, participation, completion and

successful outcomes (including employment outcomes); of the specific needs of women or sub-groups of women; and of the effectiveness of particular policies, programs and strategies which aim to counter disadvantage.

- *Policy/strategy documents*. These works describe or set down different approaches to, or programs and practices to counter identified problems. They may also set out long- and/or short-term goals and preferred methods of approaching or administering VET in general, and gender specifically. They are generally prescriptive in approach and most often produced by the Federal Government and State governments or governmental bodies.

- *Responses/submissions/issues papers*. These works consider the impact and implications of change. They are generally reactive, responding to policies, strategies, reviews or, to a lesser extent, to research findings.

- *Statistical and data collections*. These categories overlap and are linked in a variety of ways. They include mainly quantitative data collected in relation to both training and employment/unemployment. Problems still exist in data collection as systems evolve, both in relation to time lags for release of data and (still) with the disaggregation of data for equity related analyses.

- *Academic/reference texts and journals*. These works have been utilised especially relating to theoretical approaches, analyses and debates about education/work-related learning; 'work' as a field of study; policy approaches, and theoretical approaches, trends, issues and emerging debates about gender, women, difference, equality/equity and social justice.

Framework for the report

Naming the report

The most lasting impression remaining with us from this literature review is the enormity of the volume and scope of the work that has been undertaken over the last decade, mainly by women, in the optimism that their work would benefit others through enhanced opportunities and outcomes from vocationally oriented education and training. As this report finds, much of the policy-oriented research work has been project-based, and in fact designed to 'inform' or support policy implementation, more than to shape, challenge or transform policy. Although the VET system has undergone fundamental changes, the VET approach to 'the women problem' remains problematic. Indeed, it is difficult to establish direct causal links between the variety of VET equity strategies and the number, location and status of women participants in, and graduates of VET, and improved women's participation that has eventuated indirectly following wider societal changes.

Despite the efforts of the last decade and beyond, the culture and practices of VET remain masculinised, as do its structures and processes. Women and those with a commitment to equity for women have worked diligently to make the system more inclusive in its approach and equitable in its outcomes. In retrospect, this effort could be framed as 'political housework'(Butler 1997a); as trying to 'change women to fit the system'. It is well time to recognise that women comprise over 50 per cent of the total population; that systems such as VET can no longer afford to consider women as outsiders or 'exotic'. Rather, the political will is required to design and implement systems that serve women as

well as they do some men. Being 'polite' has yielded little in the way of fundamental reform for women in VET.

For these reasons, we have used the name of a well-known song of women activists and workers—'Don't be too polite girls' for the title of the report. This is one of the first feminist songs ever written in Australia (Melbourne) and is still one of the most popular[1]. As expressed in the words and through the sentiment of the song, equity is worth fighting for. Despite the time span since the song was written, there is still much to be achieved in the name of a 'fair square deal' for women in and through VET.

Structure of the report

The report has been compiled, utilising the following four main sections.

Section 1: Locating VET: Context and controversies

This section locates VET within the wider social, economic and political landscape, which impacts directly on the institutional arrangements and goals that determine VET in this country. Economic reform, social trends and implications of globalisation are discussed, prior to examining the approaches to work utilised in VET. More specifically, the position of women in the workforce is considered, as are enduring patterns of segregation that are intimately connected with approaches to vocational training for women, through VET.

Section 2: At the margins of the narrative: Women and the culture and history of VET

This section reviews quantitative and qualitative data on women's participation and experiences within various VET settings including work-based training, ACE and commercial colleges. From this work it draws some conclusions about the dominant (masculine) culture of VET and its impact on women, and goes on to investigate the strength and sources of this culture as a major legacy of the technical and further education (TAFE) system and its preceding era of 'technical education'.

Section 3: Women, equity and VET: Rhetoric, readings and realities

The task for this section is to investigate the relationships between women as students (or clients) of VET, and VET-related approaches to, and understandings of the concept of 'equity'. This is necessary, as women have been approached as a target or equity group within the VET system, rather than a gender-inclusive VET system having been designed. Given the interrelationships between VET and the ACE sector, and VET and schools, contemporary trends relating to women and girls in the sectors are discussed briefly, along with implications for VET.

Section 4: Disciplining differences: Policy, research findings and 'gaps'

This final section considers approaches to policy, and women-centred strategies that have been undertaken by and within VET. Through mapping the drivers of national policy, with various policy responses, an overview of the systemic approach to women is presented. Finally, major findings are categorised into six clusters, prior to identifying potential research gaps for future work in the area of women and VET.

Section 1

Locating VET: Contexts and controversies

The importance of considering context is argued by Taylor et al. (1997) in relation to the analysis of educational policy:

> *...analysis involves more than a narrow concern simply with a policy document or text. We need to understand both the background and context of policies, including their historical antecedents and relations with other texts, and the short and longer-term impacts of policies in practice* (Taylor et al. 1997, p.44).

In this discussion, context is defined as 'the antecedents and pressures leading to the gestation of a specific policy' including the 'many economic, social and political factors' and the 'influences of pressure groups and broader social movements' which lead to an issue being placed on the policy agenda. Taylor et al. claim that considering both contemporary and historical contexts will help in answering the questions, 'why?' and 'why now?'

Attentiveness to context is no less important in this study of the literature on women and VET, which has a wider focus than policy. An understanding of the complex interrelationship of women and VET will be assisted by an understanding of VET: its roles and functions; its structure and practice. These are not created in isolation, but as Taylor et al. indicate, are a product of past and present social, political and economic conditions, attitudes and practices, local and global.

There are many factors that help to shape the context for VET in Australia. This chapter considers some of those factors that are part of the 'big picture'. It deals first with the political landscape and the economic reforms and social trends that shape it. It then moves on to a discussion of women and their work.

Overview

The political landscape: Economic reforms and social trends

Among the many factors shaping the context for VET, changing economic and social conditions are particularly important. Many current economic and social trends can be traced back to changes in the post-war era—to the preoccupation with science and technology that followed their role in winning the war, and to the emergence of theories about economic growth and the development of human capital that developed in the context of post-war social and economic reconstruction (for example, Marginson 1997a). However, in recent decades the pace of social and economic change has quickened—and the impact of the changes has strengthened as technology has advanced, and new economic and social ideas and ideals have gained ascendancy. Today,

> *Profound changes are taking place both globally and locally. They can be seen in a globalisation of economic systems, in the rapid development of science and technology, in the age structure and mobility of populations and in the emergence of an information-based and knowledge-based society. The world is also experiencing major changes in patterns of work and unemployment, a growing*

ecological crisis, and tensions between social groups based on culture, ethnicity, gender roles, religion and income (CONFINTEA 1997).

The literature that discusses social and economic changes and their implications is both considerable and growing and also rich in references to the radical and complex nature of the changes and the multiple challenges they represent. Summy for instance (1996, quoted in Butler 1997a) refers to the present era as one of human society's 'most volatile and fragile historical periods'.

Overwhelmingly this literature presents the changes as unavoidable and beneficial in the longer term, once short-term challenges have been met and so-called necessary adjustments made. The apparent consensus is that survival and prosperity in the new world require us to be 'realistic', to change the things we do and the ways we do them. Utopian dreams of 'economic success' and the more just and fair society supposed to flow from it are proffered as the pot of gold attainable only if we march across the rainbow bridge to the Valhalla. Only rarely are assumptions challenged and a different view of the future presented:

> *The Polish graffiti 'we wanted democracy but ended up with bondmarket' could well become the chant of the world's new poor if the forces of globalisation are allowed to spiral out of control, according to Der Spiegel journalists Hans-Peter Martin and Harald Schumann. They draw a grim picture. Around the world the owners of capital and wealth are contributing less and less to the financing of public expenditure while driving wages down. Global powerbrokers foresee a time when only 20 per cent of the world's workforce will be employed...* (Capp 1998).

With few exceptions, the literature also presents the changes as gender-neutral. Differences in the ways in which they might be thought about, constructed and put into practice by women and men (or different groups of women and men), or might impact on them, are rarely discussed, and even more rarely analysed. This glaring and potentially destructive omission is made worse by ample evidence and some acknowledgement of the persistence of a 'gender or sexual contract' (Pateman 1988)—the social compact governing the roles of women and men in society:

> *The traditional gender-based division of market and non-market activities and the incompatibility of employment and family responsibilities remain unchanged* (OECD 1994, p.20).

The major social and economic trends identified here are:

- the development of a 'global economy' in which trading groups, nations and enterprises from many parts of the world compete to produce and sell goods and services through a 'global marketplace'
- economic reforms in Australia
- globalisation of cultural and political arrangements, assisted and influenced by the development and application of technologies
- demographic change, particularly the ageing of the population and workforce
- increasing participation in education and training by young people and in levels of educational attainment generally
- changing work and family arrangements and the pressures and implications for women

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All of these contextual elements raise issues and present challenges to those concerned about VET and particularly about women and VET. Questions such as what is VET for, who should participate, and how should we pay for VET, arise when new ideas and ways of doing things challenge the existing patterns of thought and behaviour. Thus today, social and economic change is:

> *...reflected in education where those responsible for complex systems are struggling to cope with new opportunities and demands, often with declining resources at their disposal* (CONFINTEA 1997).

Key themes and issues

Economic reforms

The global economy and technological change

'Globalisation' is now so widely discussed and debated, that describing and defining it in detail appears redundant, but inconsistencies in the way it is used and in the meanings it is given support the view that it remains poorly understood (Taylor et al. 1997). Its most common use now is as a 'shorthand' to describe global corporate power and the inevitability of a 'globalised economy' (Butler 1997a). Gettler, for instance finds that globalisation:

> *...is represented by the growing mobility, complexity and size of the world's capital markets the increasing irrelevance of national borders and the growing capacity of corporations to use technology to leverage their formidable know-how around the world* (Gettler 1998).

The complexities of economic globalisation are underscored by Maglen (1994) in describing a fairly long list of its main features:

- the rapid integration of telematic and information technology into the corporate planning and operations of multi-national enterprises
- the linkage of the world's financial centres and the creation of vast currency flows not primarily directed at trade
- the emergence of global oligopolies—the domination of world production (especially in high tech industries) by multi-national enterprises
- rapid change in the corporate forms of multi-national enterprises for less hierarchical, more decentralised and flexible forms
- a shift away from asset-building as a measure of corporate power to the ability to control resources across national boundaries
- the development of networks of smaller more versatile organisational forms under and between the umbrellas of multi-national enterprises
- an increase in the proportion of world trade, and intra-firm transfers, of intermediate, semi-finished goods and services
- the growth of foreign direct investment outstripping growth in trade flows between advanced countries
- the internationalisation of the division of labour to suit the corporate strategies of multinational enterprises

- a switch in advanced countries from high volume production of standardised production to the production of high value goods and services
- the internationalisation of research and development
- the marginalisation of developing countries through a growing concentration of foreign investment and technological transfer with advanced countries

These processes are combining to concentrate economic power in large multi-national enterprises, to increase competition for the production and sale of goods and services and, it is argued, to reduce the power of nation–states (see Taylor et al. 1997). Further, it is widely recognised that the processes associated with economic globalisation are increasing the gap between the haves and the have-nots (for example, Martin & Schumann 1997), and as such, have serious equity-related implications of a global as well as local scale.

An important outcome of economic globalisation is increasing competitive pressure, producing a preoccupation, including among national policy-makers, with 'international competitiveness'—the 'ability of industries in one country to compete with those of other countries' (EPAC 1991, p.3).

> *The lowering of trade barriers internationally has made nations more interdependent. Countries now have to react and adjust to economic shocks and demands generated elsewhere. Moreover, producers of tradeable [sic] goods and services now operate in a global market place where competition spans national borders* (Haddad 1997, p.35).

These competitive pressures are focussing attention on the identification and strengthening of 'competitive advantage'. Haddad (1997) identifies two basic ways of improving competitive advantage: reducing wages and increasing productivity. Acknowledging an inability to compete with low-labour cost developing countries, most western economies, including Australia, have opted to concentrate on productivity:

> *Productivity performance in both the services and manufacturing sectors will be crucial for Australia to take advantage of emerging trade opportunities* (EPAC 1991, p.7).

Improvements in productivity are being pursued largely through the development of human capital, and more efficient use of other forms of capital.

> *Australia's non-resource based comparative advantage lies in the skill and attributes of its people...upgrading the quality of the stock of human capital is imperative if our economic and social development potential is to be realised* (EPAC 1991, p.12).

An outcome of this approach has been a renewed and strengthened interest in the links between education, training and economic performance, as indicated by this description of 'lifelong learning':

> *[Lifelong learning] represents a new balance between the traditional missions of education and training—personal development; social, cultural and democratic advancement—and the economic imperatives of the labour market set in train by globalisation, technological and demographic change* (Hassan 1997, p.46).

Within the human capital approach women are valued as a resource that can be used to gain economic advantage. When this resource can be developed and applied, women are a solution to economic problems:

> *...the solution to economic problems depends on enhancing women's economic role. Women are a key resource that is currently under-utilised, both quantitatively and qualitatively* (OECD 1994, p.17).

However, when women make choices that restrict the use (or potential value) of their human capital they are problematised:

> *A high quality basic education is an essential pre-requisite for a vocationally skilled and adaptable labour force...too many students,* especially girls, *are closing off future career options by early decisions to drop the study of [core] subjects...(*Dawkins & Holding 1987, p.9).

> *...occupational segregation by gender in the Australian labour market....is not only a significant barrier to women's full and equal participation in employment but* a major source of structural rigidity and inefficiency (Dawkins & Holding 1987, p.16, our emphasis).

Although the development of human capital is primarily considered as an economic measure, it is justified also on social grounds; that is, that it has a role in improving opportunities for individuals. This is supported by evidence that those with higher levels of skills and qualifications (putting aside, for one moment, the gendered conception of skills) are more successful in the labour market.

However, Groot (1997) indicates that where resources for human capital development are distributed unevenly, inequality will increase:

> *As investments in human capital create inequality between workers they increase social inequality (wage inequality, employment opportunities etc). Thus, where training opportunities are not the same for all workers, an increase in investment in training will result in an increase in social inequality* (Groot 1997, p.16).

Groot's conclusion underscores the necessity of equitable access to education and training, if greater social equity is to be achieved.

Equitable access is an important issue also in considering technologies such as telematics and information technology—which are seen as integral elements of the economic globalisation process. By contributing to the redundancy of existing skills, the development and application of technologies is thought to lend a greater urgency to the need for skill re-formation and support an economic justification for a policy emphasis on 'lifelong learning'.

Research on the effects of the application of new technologies has been shown both to contribute to a deskilling of the labour force (for example, Greve 1990), and to increase demand for higher skills in the labour force. Issues relating to the impact of technologies on the organisation and structure of work, particularly women's work, including by enabling 'home work' are examined in more detail later in this section.

Given the gendered nature of skills (for example, Gaskell 1991a, 1991b) and the enduringly gendered nature of technology (for example Webster 1996), Caroli (1997) raises a new question that may be important for the application of technology in feminised industries and occupations and also for women's access to technology training. From a survey of research results, she concluded that at both the industry and the firm level there is a 'strong complementarity between the use of technologies and the skill levels in the labour force'. New technologies tend to require higher skills for two reasons: the role of information processing becomes more crucial in the production process and secondly, technologies enable production activities requiring unskilled labour to be moved from industrialised to developing countries, increasing the demand for higher skills in both places. However Caroli is unsure of the direction of causality. She asks, do new technologies require higher skills, or do highly skilled workers allow for the use and/or development of new technologies? Depending on which of these alternatives is correct (or in what circumstances each one applies) it is possible that views of women's skills as low-level may have different implications.

Economic reform in Australia

Since the mid-1980s economic reforms have been introduced in Australia in response to concerns about Australia's balance of payment deficits, productivity, competitiveness, international debt, the poor performance of traditional mining and agricultural exports in the changing world economy and unemployment. Protection for industry has been reduced; the finance, industry and the labour markets have been de-regulated; and the public sector has been contained and reformed (Pickersgill & Walsh 1998; Burke 1998).

These reforms have been underpinned by economic theories opposed to Keynesian ideas of big government and interventionism for the public good. Marginson (1993, 1994, 1997a) charts the growing power of these theories and their idea of individuals as rational, self-interested and utility-maximising; of competition as the best means of increasing efficiency; and of markets as the most efficient mechanism for distributing resources. These theories have provided the framework for public policy for most Australian governments since 1975.

In the language of new economics, governments are intrusive, capricious, dangerous and corrupt. Markets are rational, neutral, objective and benign (Marginson 1997a, p.112). Smaller government, which is treated 'as a universal panacea for almost every economic and social ill', is linked to a set of fiscal imperatives—the minimisation of government spending, the reduction of taxation and the elimination of government deficits. It is also linked with privatisation—'the transfer of government enterprises, institutions or programs from government institutions to the private sector'. Belief in competition and markets supports 'marketisation'—'the development of market relations though privatisation and/or commercialisation' (Marginson 1997a, pp.91–3).

Economic reforms based on a framework created by these economic ideas have brought about some changes from which women have both gained and lost.

In the labour market

Drawing on ABS data, between 1986 and 1996 (notwithstanding business cycle fluctuations):

- The total labour force increased from 7.4 to over 9 million, but unemployment rates rose from 7.9 per cent to 8.5 per cent and the number of long-term unemployed increased to 226 500. The unemployment rate was lower for women than for men and there were fewer women than men among the long-term unemployed, but most of those who withdrew from the labour force were women.
- The female labour force participation rate increased from 47.4 per cent to 53.8 per cent, while the male participation rate declined from 75.9 per cent to 73. 9 per cent.
- The average number of hours worked by full-time workers per week increased from 39.1 to 40.5.
- Employment grew most strongly in service industries, where women occupy the majority of jobs (51 per cent in 1995–96). The number of employees in these industries increased by 1.4 million, or 31 per cent.
- Employment in some production industries declined substantially: in electricity, gas and water (44 per cent or 63 300 workers); in mining (19 per cent or 20 500 workers) and in manufacturing (1.5 per cent or 17 400 workers).
- Part-time employment increased from 18.3 per cent to 24.6 per cent of total employment.
- Growth in 'white collar' occupations of about 1 million far exceeded growth in 'blue collar' occupations of about 100 000.
- The number of employed personal service workers increased more strongly than any other occupation—by 90 per cent or 143 600 workers—providing more opportunities for women.
- The number of miscellaneous clerks declined more strongly than other occupations, by 41 per cent or 26 100 workers, providing fewer opportunities for women.
- The proportion of the labour force working part-time and identified as wanting more work rose from 2.8 per cent (May 1985) to 5.6 per cent (September 1997). Most of these workers (62 per cent) are women and *most have no post-school qualifications*. An increasing proportion of these workers are aged over 45.
- Between 1989 and 1992 the number of home workers increased by 15 per cent.

On the plus side, women have benefited from increased opportunities for employment in service industries, for home work and for part-time work. Unemployment has been lower among women than men, and they have been able to find work more quickly.

On the debit side, women have faced declining opportunities in clerical work and in manufacturing and some who would prefer full-time work have taken part-time jobs. Home work presents mixed blessings for women (*Women & Work* 1996). ABS research also shows that unemployed women more often choose to quit the labour force than unemployed men (ABS 1997, Cat. no. 6286.0). In addition, women have been unable to close the gap between female and male earnings. In 1975 the ratio of the female wage to the male wage for all employees was 66 per cent. It increased slightly to 67 per cent in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but returned to 66 per cent in 1983 (Sampson 1991). In May 1996, average weekly total earnings for women ($443.10) were only 65.1 per cent of average weekly total earnings for men ($680.10) (ABS 1996, Cat. no. 6305.0).

Unequal earnings reflect not only a concentration of women in part-time work and lower status jobs, but also perceptions of women's work and skills, and perhaps also the impact

of a deregulated labour market. The gap between male and female earnings of 35 per cent, indicated above, is reduced when only full-time workers in similar occupations are considered. Among full-time adult non-managerial employees, average ordinary-time hourly earnings for females ($15.60) are 90.1 per cent of the male rate ($17.30). Part of the gap between male and female total earnings can thus be explained by differences between part-time and full-time work and between occupations. Nevertheless, the remaining gap of almost ten per cent is still large and other explanations are necessary.

More generally, a growing divergence between workers in low-paid part-time or casual work and those in continuous full-time employment, and the disappearance of middle-level jobs is contributing to a polarisation in pay, conditions and hours of work (see, for instance, Shah & Maglen 1998).

Richardson (1997) argues that inequality in private incomes is growing and that policies to promote growth in average income have contributed to this. She believes that the high degree of economic inequality disturbs and confronts the ethic of social equality—that all people are equal in their citizenship and have a right be treated as such.

In May 1996 the average weekly total earnings of full-time adults working as managers and administrators ($1125.80) were double those of elementary clerical, sales and service worker ($557.50), but four times those of all part-time employees ($251.80). Considering all employees, the gap between the tenth and 90th percentiles for average weekly total earnings, $840.60, was much greater than average weekly total earnings of $570.00 (ABS 1996, Cat. no. 6305.0).

Young people have been particularly affected by labour market changes. Wooden (1998) observes a collapse in opportunities for full-time employment for young people, coupled with a rapid rise in part-time employment opportunities. In August 1997 only a third of the teenage workforce were in full-time employment, but half were in part-time work. A very high proportion (20 per cent) were looking for work. The vast majority of part-time teenage workers were also in full-time education and almost half of those classified as unemployed were also full-time students.

Young people anxious to secure work are more open to exploitation, low wages, long hours and poor working conditions. Since 1982 there has been a significant fall in the real wages and salaries of young people. This fall was greater for part-time work (29 per cent) than full-time work (six per cent). The work that they do is usually part-time, casual and insecure. Opportunities for permanent employment and for work-related training are rare (Landt & Scott 1998).

The labour force participation rate for young women is higher than for young men, and fewer are unemployed (Wooden 1998). Significantly for their future labour market prospects however, young women are also less likely to be in education or training, more likely to be sole parents and also more likely than young men to exit from unemployment by withdrawing from the labour force. Some young women with children become alienated from the world of work, seeing it as hostile (McLelland et al. 1998).

In education

Economic reforms have led to increasing competition for declining government funding, coupled with a greater reliance on private funding and a heightened concern for efficiency. On average, cuts in funding by the Commonwealth Government and State governments

over recent years have reduced public expenditure per student in education and training. Government education outlays have declined slightly as a proportion of GDP from six per cent in the late 1970s to about five per cent in 1995–96. Private sector outlays on education have increased much faster than government outlays, but most private outlays are still government financed. Australia's total outlays on education as a percentage of GDP are now at the lower end for OECD countries (Burke 1998).

Government education institutions have been encouraged to control expenditure (for example, through benchmarking exercises) and to obtain a greater proportion of their funds from non-government sources—such as through fee-for-service activities. An increasing proportion of public funds has gradually been made available on a competitive basis to both public and private providers (Burke 1998).

Major reforms to higher education, introduced in 1988, reflected government concern that participation levels were below those in nations such as the United States and Japan, and resulted in an economic focus on the need for higher level skills. An expansion in numbers was directed to areas of particular economic need. Subsequent enrolment growth was much faster, and stronger, than anticipated. Student numbers were expected to reach 450 000 in 2001, but approached 660 000 in 1997. They were only 400 000 in 1987. Due in part to demographic fluctuations, growth in student numbers has been faster among persons in their twenties than teenagers (Burke 1998).

In vocational education and training, reforms accelerated in the late 1980s and have continued to the present. These reforms have been aimed to complement and support economic reforms in industry and the labour market, linking skill formation and productivity improvements:

> *Since the mid-1980s, the role of education and training in improving national economic performance was stressed as a major issue in public policy. There was a general agreement amongst peak government and industry advisory bodies that global economic pressures made it necessary to substantially increase both quality and flexibility in the Australian product and labour markets and that improved and more flexible systems were required to support higher levels of skill formation in the workforce* (Pickersgill & Walsh 1998, p.2).

In contrast to higher education, student numbers have grown less strongly than anticipated, but this growth has attracted a comparatively greater proportion of education resources. Table 1.1 below shows government outlays on TAFE for 1988 and 1994. Over this period there was a real increase in total outlays of 31 per cent, far exceeding enrolment growth of 17 per cent. Over the same period, real outlays on higher education grew by 44 per cent, slightly exceeding enrolment growth of 39 per cent.

As will be discussed later in this report, the main aim of this reform has been to create a VET system that is more responsive to, and led by industry.

Table 1.1: Government outlays on TAFE

Year	*Cons*	*Capital*	*Benefits*	*Other*	*Total*
1988	1.19	0.25	0.08	0.01	1.52
1994	1.95	0.25	0.24	0.04	2.48
Increase					
Nominal %	64	-1	195		63
Real %	33	-20	138		31

Source: Burke 1996, table 7, figures derived from ABS data
Note: 'cons' means operating expenditure

Social trends

Globalisation and technological development

Although the term 'globalisation' is commonly used to refer to an economic process, it is really a much more complex and multi-faceted phenomenon. Hall and Harley (1995) and Taylor et al. (1997) both describe political and cultural, as well as economic dimensions of globalisation. As described by Taylor et al. the dimensions are interrelated, but each is manifested in a set of social arrangements:

Table 1.2: Dimensions of globalisation

Economic	Social arrangements for the production, exchange, distribution and consumption of goods and services
Political	Social arrangements for the distribution of power, of centres of policy development and of institutional practices of authority and control
Cultural	Social arrangements for the production, exchange and expression of signs and symbols—meanings, beliefs and preferences, tastes and values

Source: adapted from Taylor et al. (1997)

This broader view of globalisation illustrates it as 'a set of processes', rather than a single, if complex, economic process, and draws attention to the many (and sometimes conflicting) ways in which it undermines traditional views and practices. Drawing on the work of Giddens it can be seen as a series of 'supranational connections' that are gradually remaking the world into a 'neighbourhood' (Taylor et al. 1997).

Globalisation processes can be seen to operate at two levels, termed 'globalisation from above and below'. At the higher level, powerful flows of capital and culture have a homogenising and determining effect. At the lower level, democratic grass roots political movements based on notions of global communities and proactive citizenship are emerging. These consist of:

> *...an array of transnational social forces animated by environmental concerns, human rights, hostility to patriarchy and a vision of human community based on the unity of diverse cultures seeking an end to poverty, oppression, humiliation and collective violence* (Falk 1993 quoted in Taylor et al. 1997, p.75).

The ability of technology to connect people across national borders is recognised as influential in the spread of globalisation 'from below', but its ability to transmit ideas,

'culture', also contributes to globalisation from above and thus to the homogenisation of cultural diversity:

> *...the increasing global distribution of images through concentrated media and technology ownership, for example the empires of Rupert Murdoch and Bill Gates, has potential for homogenising cultural differences, captured in talk of the 'McDonaldisation' of culture* (Taylor et al. 1997, p.60).

In the context of the political dimension of globalisation, Taylor et al. observe contradictory forces of global integration and national fragmentation. They note for example, how the emergence of 'supranational political units'—the green and peace movements and the European Union for instance—stand in striking contrast to the disintegration of some nations (for instance, the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and the separatist movements in parts of the UK and Canada.) In the tensions between these contradictory forces they also observe the emergence of new 'hybrid' or 'post-national' identities, such as 'Greek–Australians' and 'African–Americans'.

Haraway (1985) is also concerned with the emergence of new 'hybrids' although of a different kind—combinations of 'machine and organism', of 'technical and organic' arising from 'high-tech culture'.

> *It is not clear who makes and who is made in the relation between human and machine. It is not clear what is mind and what body in machines that resolve into coding practices. Insofar as we know ourselves in both formal discourse (for example, biology) and in daily practice...we find ourselves to be cyborgs, hybrids, mosaics, chimeras. Biological organisms have become biotic systems, communications devices like others. There is no fundamental ontological separation in our formal knowledge of machine and organism, of technical and organic* (Haraway 1985, p.97).

Each of these developments presents challenges to existing traditions and practices and adds to the prevailing uncertainty. Taylor et al. contend that the conflicting forces they observe—and the formation of new hybrid identities may have 'profound implications for our understanding of the nation state' and for political organisation (1997, pp.59–60). In Haraway's view a range of 'dualisms' in Western traditions, including those that underpin the logics and practices of domination of women, are being challenged by 'high-tech cultures'. Among these dualisms are culture/nature, male/female, truth/illusion, mind/body, all of which are deeply embedded in the modern institution and practices of VET, and which work silently but powerfully against the interests of women.

Ageing populations

Changes in the structure of populations have implications for social relations, for work and family arrangements and for the demand and distribution of government resources. A recent witty headline, 'nations are in for a grey old time' aptly introduced a discussion of the extent and the implications of the ageing of the population in most OECD nations:

> *The coming explosion in the aged sector, caused by the maturing of the baby boomers, coupled with longer lifespans, is starting to stand many cosy assumptions on their head* (Brenchley 1997).

According to this article, the OECD predicts that, in the next 30 years, the proportion of older people in the population will double, rising from 19 per cent in 1990 to reach 37 per cent on average, but in some countries. In Australia also, the ABS predicts that over the next four decades (ABS 1995, Cat. no. 4102.0), the population will age rapidly so that by the year 2024, there will be more elderly people (aged 65 and over) than children (aged 0–14 years). This is expected to increase demand for aged care services—and possibly reduce demand for children's services.

The impact of the 'political muscle' of this 'elderly wave' is expected to be significant. The *Australian Financial Review* quotes a European economist:

> *Boskin said the effect of waves of elderly through all OECD economies in the first 30 years of the 21st century would change most industries, not to mention government budgets* (Brenchley 1997).

Its impact will also be felt within families, where adjustments may be necessary to enable care for elderly relatives. This is expected to impact more on women than men, for in both their market and non-market work women take a major responsibility for care of the elderly. (ABS data show that most people aged 65–74 who receive domestic assistance from their children, rely mostly on their daughters.)

> *Demographic trends mean that many women are confronted with increasing pressure to care for elderly relatives* (OECD 1994, p.20).
>
> *...the need to take care of elderly parents will undoubtedly create an additional source of pressure in the future* (OECD 1994, p.69).

An ageing population also means an ageing workforce. The ABS divides the 15–64-year-old working population into three groups: youth (15–24), prime (25–44) and older (45–64). Over the next 50 years the proportion of the population in the youth and prime groups is expected to decline, but the proportion in the older group is expected to increase (from 30 per cent in 1993 to 39 per cent in 2041). By 2011 the median age of a female worker will be 38.5 and a male worker will be 39.4. Much of the workforce will thus be 'middle-aged'. Among the implications of this change in the expectation for, a stronger demand for 'lifelong learning' than for entry-level training.

Changing families

More than 80 per cent of the Australian people live in various groupings and arrangements most often referred to as families. The large majority of families are couples and almost half of these couples have dependants. Fewer than 20 per cent of families are one-parent families of which two-thirds have dependants and the vast majority (about 80 per cent) have a female parent (ABS 1997, Cat. no. 6224.0).

Reflecting a declining birth rate, and the ageing of the population, the proportion of families made up of couples only (with no dependants) has grown from 30 per cent in 1986 to 34 per cent of all families in 1996. An increase in the divorce rate (from 10.9 per 1000 marriages in 1986) to 12.3 per cent in 1996 may have contributed to an increase in the proportion of one-parent families from 15 per cent to 19 per cent (ABS 1997, Cat. no. 4102.0).

The structure of families, their internal divisions of responsibility for paid and unpaid work and the decisions they make about the distribution of family resources, influence the life experiences of the individuals in these families, their activity in the broader society, including participation in education and training (for example, Bittman & Pixley 1997).

ABS data (ABS 1997, Cat. no. 6224.0) show that the characteristics of families are changing:

- In almost all couple families with dependants (91 per cent), one or both parents are in paid employment. In most cases, a male parent is in full-time work and a female parent in part-time work, but the proportion of the women employed full-time increases with the age of the youngest dependant. The proportion of families with both parents in paid employment has increased since 1986, from 41 per cent to 54 per cent. The proportion of families in which the partners work more than 60 combined hours per week has also increased, from 33 per cent to 40 per cent.

- The number of couple families without dependants has exceeded the number with dependants since June 1994. Fewer of these families than families with dependants have one or both partners in paid employment (62 per cent compared with 91 per cent). This probably reflects the ageing of the population.

- The percentage of one-parent families with the parent employed increases with the age of the youngest dependant. Overall however, fewer than half of the parents in one-parent families are in paid employment and this proportion has declined since 1986 (from 50.2 per cent to 46.8 per cent). Employment patterns are slightly different for male and female parents. More male parents are in paid employment and more (55 per cent compared with 22 per cent) are in full-time employment. More female parents work part-time (22 per cent compared with 12 per cent of males).

Although women's participation in the labour force has increased in recent years, their employment is disproportionately concentrated in part-time employment. Bittman (1998) suggests that as a result, raw labour force participation figures tend to give a misleadingly large impression of the hours that women commit to the paid workforce. Bittman's research shows that within families, women still have major responsibility for unpaid work, including housework and childcare. Overall however, and consistent with increased labour force participation, the hours they devote to these activities have generally declined. An interesting exception is the case of childcare, where hours have increased steadily since 1974. Bittman (1998) links this increase with the tendency for women to have fewer children and at a later age than did previous generations, noting that it is among women born after 1948 that the tendency towards spending increased time with young children is strongest.

The curve of married women's age-specific labour force participation is an M-shape produced by a dip in the peak child-bearing years. The dip is becoming flatter as more women maintain their labour force participation while bearing and raising children (Bittman 1998; OECD 1994). Availability of childcare has played an important part in this change. Recent press reports have pointed to difficulties being faced by women as a result of changes in childcare policy which have substantially increased fees. These reports

indicate that women are cutting back their hours of paid work, or leaving the workforce. Analysis of labour force data for 1998 might confirm—or deny—these trends.

Internal distribution of family resources, which will be affected by changes in childcare arrangements are also being affected by an extension of the dependency of young people on their families. Due to a combination of increased participation in post-school education and training, and poor labour market conditions, young people are remaining dependent on their families for a much longer period than in the past (ABS 1995, Cat. no. 4102.0).

Table 1.3 below shows that the participation of 17–19-year-olds in education and training in Australia has risen substantially since the mid-1970s, particularly in schools.

Table 1.3: Educational participation rates of 17–19-year-olds (per cent)

Year	Schools	TAFE	Higher education	Total
1975	13	20	11	45
1985	16	24	11	50
1990	20	25	15	60
1995	24	26	17	66

Source: Burke 1998

Tessaring (1997) points to an important paradox in relation to young people. On the one hand, he notes, it has been observed in most European and non-European countries that education and qualifications are closely linked to success on the labour market. A higher level of qualification correlates significantly with lower unemployment rates, higher wages and better career opportunities. On the other hand, although young people are better qualified than any preceding generation, their transitional problems have worsened. In spite of 'numerous measures' they still have great difficulty in moving from education and training to full-time work.

In Australia, research by Dwyer and Wyn (1998) indicates that the traditional idea of direct pathways from study to work is redundant and that individual young people now put work and study together in different and changing combinations to suit their circumstances.

Educational attainment

Since the late 1980s, participation in education and training and levels of educational attainment have risen in Australia across all age groups. The proportion of people aged 15–64 with post-school qualifications increased from 37 per cent in 1986 to 42 per cent in 1996 (ABS 1997, Cat. no. 4102.0).

Across the education sectors, between 1988 and 1994, the number of students rose in school years 11 and 12 by 3 per cent, in VET by 18 per cent and in higher education by 39 per cent (Burke 1995). Over the same period the proportion of female students remained largely unchanged at just over half in schools and higher education and about 46 per cent in VET. Differences in VET data will be examined in more detail in a later section of this report.

In the working-age population (15–64 years), fewer women than men have post-school qualifications (52 per cent compared with 62 per cent). The proportions of women and men with higher education qualifications are about the same (12 per cent and 13 per cent), but

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fewer women have VET qualifications (21 per cent compared with 33 per cent). Among women, VET qualifications are skewed to lower (basic vocational) levels. Reflecting increasing participation in education and training (particularly higher education), more young women have post-school qualifications than older women (Burke 1998).

Educational attainment is positively related to labour force participation—particularly for women. Those with post-school qualifications have a higher rate of labour force participation than those without and levels of labour force participation rise with the level of the qualification. Conversely, unemployment is higher among those with the lowest levels of education and training. In 1995 the unemployment rate for persons who did not complete secondary school was 10 per cent, compared to four per cent for persons with a bachelor degree. In addition, those with higher levels of education and training remain unemployed for shorter periods (Burke 1998).

However, in the changing labour market the nature of the post-school qualification is important. From 1989 to 1993 there was an increase in the number of qualified tradespeople not working in their trade, from 46 to 51 per cent (ABS 1995, Cat. no. 4102.0). Research by Dockery and Norris cited in Ball and Robinson (1998) finds that apprenticeships in male-dominated trades yield quite high returns, but returns are low, or even negative in some female-dominated areas.

The reasons motivating increased participation in education and training are complex. In relation to participation in VET, which is often principally connected with gaining work, or improving work or promotion opportunities, Anderson (1997b) and Volkoff and Golding (1998) indicate that many people are motivated by a broader range of work and non-work related reasons.

> *What is striking in our research is that participants accessed a range of VET providers for reasons other than those which might be related to a narrowly construed view of the purposes of industrial training, skilling or of direct labour market outcomes...there is a wide range of non-economic factors associated with common social goals which lead to participation in VET. Many are difficult and facile to characterise in purely economic terms* (Volkoff & Golding 1998).

This evidence supports a broad role for VET—one in which it performs distinct social as well as economic functions.

Women, work and not-so-'new' times

As the major goal of vocational training is that of providing and enhancing learning opportunities and outcomes for both prospective and existing workers, we argue that it is necessary to include in this literature review, consideration of women's position in the labour market, along with identification of a few of the factors that are implicated in the quest for equity. The relationships between life chances, education and work have been well established and documented over time. Despite this, there is a paucity of literature linking and interrogating the relationships between equity for women, their location in the workforce/labour markets, the changing nature of work, and vocational education and training. This section considers (albeit briefly) selected literature that focuses on women and work[2], patterns and trends of segregation, and implications of contemporary changes in work for women.

The purpose of this 'snap shot' is to contextualise vocational education and training for women in Australia in relation to both enduring patterns of segregation and issues and opportunities associated with the rapid contemporary changes in the area of paid work. While the focus here is on paid work, the narrowness of this approach to work is acknowledged, especially given the significance of unpaid work—to the national economy, the labour market and to workplaces (although rarely acknowledged); to tensions associated with balancing work and home demands; and to the tendency of women to continue shouldering the responsibility for and burden of most unpaid work (for example, Alston 1998, 1995; ANESBWA 1994; Baxter et al. 1990; Bittman & Pixley 1997; Probert 1997a; Williams with Thorpe 1993; Wolcott 1996). Indeed, this is a topic on which the VET-related literature is all but silent.

Approaches to work

VET-related literature and policy documents adopt an unproblematic approach to the complex concept of work. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to elaborate on the diversity of approaches to defining work (for example, Grint 1991; Pahl 1988), James (1997) provides a useful framework identifying three central conceptualisations of work:

- *instrumental rational*—work is a measurable abstracted activity, performed in the public sphere, and having utility for others (1997, p.309)
- *productivist*—work as efficient, purposive, socially useful activity (1997, p.310)
- *cultural-ontological*—work is purposive…involves an engagement whether manual or intellectual, with a social and natural world beyond self; work is a social practice that makes a difference to that world, and work has as its end the reproduction or enhancement of social life (1997, p.311)

As highlighted by James (1997, p.309) 'far from being neutral designations of the meaning of the term (work), each of these conceptions presumes a politics and approach to how we should live'.

Overwhelmingly, the approaches to work utilised unproblematically by VET are that of the instrumental-rational—work is measurable, and to a lesser extent, the productivist approach. This claim is well illustrated by the VET policy insistence on utilising a competency-based approach as the basis for defining what work *is*, as well as for curriculum design, delivering and assessing training. Little if any interest is apparent in mainstream VET policy to the social role of work in people's lives, the close connections between work and identity (for example, Gleeson 1996), how work can enhance social life (Hart 1992, 1993), the contribution of work to community social infrastructure and so economic development, such as that contributed by rural women (Alston 1998). Rather, the primary purpose of VET continues to be that of meeting the 'needs' of business, and national economic wellbeing, to the detriment of the human or worker perspective of vocational education and training.

Although women as individuals work at all levels and across all industries and occupations, strong and enduring clustering patterns of women workers as a group are evident in the Australian data exhibited in the next section. While Australia has the unenviable position of having one of the most gender-segregated workforces of all OECD countries, it is also useful to remember that these patterns of gender segregation occur in other OECD countries, as well as in recently industrialised and industrialising countries. The patterns exhibit the high numbers of women who work in direct service delivery areas—the so-

called feminised industries. In these occupations, work is very closely connected to the cultural-ontological and productivist categories of work. More than manufacturing 'things', 'products' are intimately connected with people and their quality of life.

Most often, such occupations are associated with skills defined as 'female that is they are connected to the domestic and so perceived as soft and low level skills. This non-recognition of the core value and centrality of work of women in both the public sphere and the private/domestic continues as the basis of the politics and contestation over skills that has been prevalent in women's long struggles for equality, and indeed, pay equity and comparable worth in Australia as in many other overseas countries (for example, Acker 1989, 1990; Butler & Brown 1993; Emery 1993; Jackson 1991; Jenson et al. 1988).

The establishment of the NTRA framework (policy, systems and structures) accepted the gendered paradigm of the day (Probert 1997a, p.181). The system was designed around the model of the metals industry especially, and perpetuated long-held ideals inherent in trade apprenticeship training. In this way, the concept of work in VET was not problematised. Rather, the new national system for VET in Australia adopted unproblematically, if unconsciously, the notion that industries were the very basis of work. This then became the major platform through which work was (and is) located and so defined.

Despite the industry and award reform that accompanied the training reform, the service sector had rarely if ever considered itself as 'industry'. However, through policy directives, clusters of previously informally and very loosely connected groups of occupations or services were collected for the first time into 'industries', and assigned to various groupings under industry training advisory boards (ITABs). For heavily feminised areas such as community services, health, and clerical work, this was a complete culture shift that raised many profound issues. Debates proliferated over a wide range of issues from questions about what it meant to be 'an industry' to processes for representation and decision-making in the newly prescribed 'industry' groupings; from questioning of the very process of setting competency standards to the potential for inclusion of values and ideologies in the setting of national competency standards (for example, Emery 1992a, 1992b).

It is generally assumed that the competencies defined in the masculinised/trades areas were and are non-problematic. This can be viewed as a total blindness to gender, and as an act of reproducing (male) trade knowledge as value free or 'neutral'. Gender-inclusive competency development in such locations was rarely if ever considered, or described as not relevant, despite a decade of feminist critique and focus on trying to attract women to 'non-traditional (trades) areas for education, training and work (Chataway & Chataway 1992; Cowling 1995; Francis 1993; Frizzell 1991; Lyall & Hawkins 1993; Kyle & Wright 1993; McNamara & Pyke 1993; Morley 1994a, 1994b, 1994c; Pyke 1993, 1996; Shortus 1998; Windsor 1989).

Unlike the masculinised industries with their long histories of craft unions and apprenticeships, most feminised industries and occupations started without such histories or accompanying privileges (Ewer 1998; Williams 1993). This experience is far from new in Australia as demonstrated by the documenting of women's work experiences in the early days of white settlement (Ryan & Conlon 1975). Indeed, it is still reflected in the masculine cultures of trade unions (Pocock 1997a) and the industrial relations field generally (Pocock 1997b; Smith & Ewer 1995). With the advent of the NTRA, the task of defining work in feminised industries and occupations began the lengthy and hotly contested process of

categorising work as competencies. These slices and sequences of observable, measurable activities were ranked by industrial parties, and (de)valued accordingly, within the technicist paradigms of both a technical-rationalist approach to work and that of competency based standards. This narrow framing continues as a problematic and even paradoxical issue.

On one hand, and despite the limitations of the technicist approach, work in the feminised industries historically undertaken mainly by women has begun a process of analysis and description, which has provided an opportunity for women to talk about their work in 'mainstream' task-oriented language, rather than in terms of gendered personality traits (for example Cox & Leonard 1991; Poynton & Lazenby 1993; Poynton 1993). Although much work in feminised occupations and industries remains undervalued by the aligning of its skills and knowledge base to the lower levels of the standards frameworks' arbitrary levels, description associated with competency standards can help support claims for comparative pay, such as that being undertaken currently in the New South Wales Pay Equity Case and earlier work in areas of clerical and community services (for example, Charlesworth 1993a, 1993b; Kenna 1993a, 1993b; NOSFAB 1994; Whyte 1994)). Moreover, and despite the disappointing delivery of recognition of prior learning (RPL) services in the wider community, an important mechanism is provided to enable women (and men) to pursue the recognition of work-related skills acquired outside of formal training or even paid workplaces (for example, Travers 1995).

On the other hand, the very approaches to capturing work into competency frameworks diminishes and subjugates the depth and richness of the knowledges inherent in much of the service work undertaken by women, especially the knowledges and skills associated with the affective domain rather than skills *per se* (Emery 1992a, 1992b; Butler & Connole 1993). Similarly, without expert attention to process when defining competencies, the frameworks tend to subjugate cultural differences (McIntyre et al. undated) as well as those associated with gender (Butler & Connole 1992, 1993; Connole and Butler 1995; Burton 1994; Courtenay & Mawer 1998; Herbert 1992; Windsor 1991). In these ways, skill continues as a political site of struggle for the recognition and valuing of work associated with women (Blackmore 1992; Gaskell 1991a, 1991b, 1995; Jackson 1991).

Given this overview, we now consider briefly the position of women workers in the Australian labour market. In so doing, we also acknowledge the body of literature (for example, Eisenstein 1996; Franzway et al. 1989; Pateman 1988, 1992) which provides a framework for analysis of how, although presented in reified and gender-neutral terminology, the labour market is neither neutral nor benign. The Australian labour market is constructed on a legacy of colonial values that continue to marginalise significant sections of our community (Butler 1997a).

Women in the Australian Labour Force

This section gives an overview of women's participation in the labour force using data provided by the ABS.[3] These data illustrate the often-cited case that Australia has one of the most gender-segregated labour forces when compared with other member countries of the Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD). This segregation is both horizontal (in industry categories) and vertical (in occupational hierarchies). It is also significant in the distinction between full-time and part-time work, when comparing women's participation patterns with those of men.

Prior to surveying the statistical data regarding women in the labour force, it is also relevant to note that it is not possible to speak of a single attitude to, or experience of, work for women. Just as there are countless ways of 'being' a woman, there are equally diverse ways in which women think about, learn for and experience 'work', in or out of the official labour market.

Participation characteristics

Table 1.4 shows characteristics of women's and men's labour force participation at February 1997. While women make up 50 per cent of the total population, they comprise a smaller proportion of the labour force (43.3 per cent). In spite of the lower labour force participation rate by women than men (54.4 per cent compared with 73.6 per cent), their participation has continued to rise over the last decade. In 1987, 63 per cent of women aged between 15 and 69 were in the labour force, compared with 70 per cent in 1997 (ABS Media Release 11/5/97). Over the same period, labour force participation by men has remained steady.

Table 1.4: Labour force characteristics—February 1997

	Men	*Women*
Civilian population aged 15 years and over	7 131 400	7 359 900
Per cent of total	49.2	50.8
Labour force	5 251 400	4 004 600
Per cent of labour force	56.7	43.3
Participation rate	73.6	54.4
Participation rate—persons born outside Australia	68.8	48.9
Unemployment rate	9.8	9.8
Unemployment rate—persons born outside Australia	10.1	11.4

Source: ABS 1997, Cat. no. 6203.0, table 4 and table 14

Part-time employment

However, women's employment continues to show markedly different characteristics from that of men's. As table 1.5 shows, women are more likely to work part-time, (nearly three-quarters of all part-time workers were women while less than one-third of full-timers were women in February 1997).

Table 1.5: Full- and part-time employment—February 1997

Status	*Men*	*Women*
Number in employment	4 737 900	3 612 100
Per cent of total employment	56.7	43.3
Number in full-time employment	4 210 600	2 067 300
Per cent of full-time employment	67.1	32.9
Number in part-time employment	527 300	1 544 800
Per cent of part-time employment	25.4	74.6

Source: ABS 1997, Cat. no. 6203.0, table 4

Women have always predominated in part-time employment. Although the argument that part-time employment suits women still persists, what is conscientiously overlooked is the

fact that nearly a quarter of part-time women reported that they would prefer to work more hours. This large number of individuals who do not want to work part time continue to be ignored (table 1.6).

Table 1.6: Part-time workers ('000): whether preferred to work more hours—February 1997

	Men	%	Women	%
Preferred not to work more hours	313.2	59.4	1188.1	76.9
Preferred to work more hours	214.1	40.6	356.7	23.1
Had actively looked for full-time work in the four weeks to the end of the reference week	119.6	22.7	126.7	8.2
Total	527.3		1544.8	

Source: ABS 1997, Cat. no. 6203.0, table 20

Occupation

In spite of their steadily increasing participation in the work force, women continue to be concentrated in certain industries and occupations (see table 1.7).

Table 1.7: Employed persons by occupation—February 1997

	Full-time ('000)		Part-time ('000)		Total ('000)	
Occupation major group	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Managers & administrators	456.7	111.0	19.3	41.6	476.0	152.6
Professionals	659.7	470.8	52.2	212.2	711.9	682.9
Associate professionals	535.6	249.4	29.7	79.3	565.3	328.7
Tradespersons & related workers	999.9	69.3	53.6	38.9	1053.6	108.2
Advanced clerical & service workers	33.6	200.3	5.3	154.1	38.8	354.3
Intermediate clerical, sales & service workers	339.5	566.0	54.3	429.7	393.7	995.7
Intermediate production & transport workers	609.8	68.7	71.9	40.7	681.7	109.3
Elementary clerical, sales & service workers	190.8	195.6	116.2	362.0	307.0	557.6
Labourers and related workers	384.9	136.3	125.0	186.5	509.9	322.8
Total	**4210.6**	**2067.3**	**527.3**	**1544.8**	**4737.9**	**3612.1**

Source: ABS 1997, Cat. no. 6203.0, table 47

Over half (52.8 per cent) of all employed women work in clerical, sales and service occupations. A further 28.0 per cent work as professionals or associate professionals. The most-marked occupational difference between women and men is in the trades area where men outnumber women by ten to one.

Industry

In addition to being concentrated in certain occupational areas, women are also largely confined to four industry groupings (see table 1.8). These are: retailing (17 per cent), health and community services (16.5 per cent), property and business services (10.2 per cent), and education (10.0 per cent). Combined, these four industries account for over half of women's employment.

Table 1.8: Employed persons by industry—February 1997

	Full-time ('000)		Part-time ('000)		Total ('000)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Agriculture, forestry & fishing	271.5	66.3	33.0	67.3	304.5	133.6
Mining	72.9	7.5	*1.4	*2.0	74.3	9.5
Manufacturing	801.2	227.9	28.6	75.6	829.9	303.5
Electricity, gas and water supply	52.2	8.2	*1.3	*1.7	53.5	10.0
Construction	463.6	31.2	31.0	56.6	494.7	87.8
Wholesale trade	320.8	100.4	20.4	51.9	341.1	152.3
Retail trade	450.6	241.2	159.3	374.7	609.9	615.9
Accommodation, cafes & restaurants	122.5	101.7	54.4	133.9	176.8	235.7
Transport & storage	283.4	64.6	25.4	31.1	308.8	95.7
Communication services	104.9	36.4	*3.9	13.4	108.9	49.8
Finance & insurance	133.7	132.1	6.4	48.4	140.2	180.4
Property & business services	398.2	237.0	59.5	131.3	457.7	368.3
Government administration & defence	207.4	122.9	6.3	39.0	213.7	161.9
Education	167.2	232.4	25.1	127.7	192.3	360.2
Health & community services	140.1	315.1	27.5	279.4	167.6	594.5
Cultural & recreational services	77.0	54.6	22.2	46.9	99.3	101.5
Personal & other services	143.2	87.8	21.5	63.7	164.8	151.5
Total	4210.6	2067.3	527.3	1544.8	4737.9	3612.1

Source: ABS 1997, Cat. no. 6203.0, table 41[4]

Table 1.8 also shows those industries in which women are disproportionately represented (that is, they comprise a greater share of all employment in that industry than their 43 per cent share of the total labour market). These industries are health and community services (where 78 per cent of all employed persons are women), education (65.2 per cent), accommodation, cafes and restaurants (57.1 per cent), and finance and insurance (56.3 per cent). Women's representation is exceedingly low in mining (11.3 per cent), construction (15.1 per cent), electricity, gas and water (15.7 per cent), and transport and storage (23.7 per cent). For part-timers the figures are even more stark with 91 per cent of all employed people in health and community services being women, 88 per cent in finance and insurance, 83.6 per cent in education and 70 per cent in retail trades.

While such data are useful for a generalised account of 'where women are' in the labour force, they do not readily identify differences, such as those of women from non-English-speaking backgrounds, many of whom continue to work in full-time jobs in manufacturing industries (for example, Alcorso & Harrison 1993; Bertone 1995, 1996; Junor et al. 1993; Nasser 1996; Pearce et al. 1995; Stephens & Bertone 1995); of indigenous women (for example, Davies 1996; Rebbeck 1996; Runciman 1994; Sykes 1996); of rural women (for example, Alston 1995; Mageean 1990, 1989); of outworkers and women who work from home (Dawson et al. undated; Murphy 1993; Delaney 1997; *Women & Work* 1996).

While acknowledging the need for quantitative statistical data disaggregated to provide more detailed information relating to differences, as well as the baseline 'norm', qualitative data are also essential, both to 'situate' and embody quantitative data, to highlight and explain the impact of layers of difference, and also to expose some of the many bases on which choices are made by women about work (and training).

Some examples of such research relevant to this project include that relating to women living in different urban locations and of differing classes (Blaxter et al. 1996; Probert with MacDonald 1996; Probert 1997b); and to disabled women. The impact of culture, both workplace and broader social 'norms', along with women's choices and work-related decision-making practices and experiences are contributed by literature focusing on women small business operators and owners (for example, Barrett 1997; Clemans & Bradshaw 1998; Kempnich et al. 1999; Roffey et al. 1996; SAWAC 1996; Still & Timms 1997). Research and literature that foregrounds self-employed women (Still et al. 1990); women managers and leaders (for example, Marshall 1995; Sinclair 1998; Still et al. 1992) exposes and challenge myths while providing new paradigms for understanding women's contemporary work-related experiences. Other qualitative research serves to highlight deficiencies in statistical and labour market related categories (for example, Alston 1998, Kempnich et al. 1999) or to expose compound disadvantage.

However, what the ABS statistical data do present starkly is the clustering of women into feminised areas of work, at lower occupational levels, and their predominance in part-time work. Each of these factors has important ramifications for vocational education and training—many of which still require urgent attention. ANTA itself acknowledges that 'the participation of women in training contracts reflects the gender segmentation of the workforces as a whole and this segmentation is also reflected in group training' (ANTA 1997a, p.6). The feminised areas are those where traineeships rather than apprenticeships predominate. This training is both shorter, and perceived as lower in status to that of apprenticeships, despite the re-arranging of both apprenticeships and traineeships into the National Apprenticeship System.

The feminised areas are also those where most on-the-job training takes place. Much of it continues to be informal and poorly recognised or compensated. The industries are those with lower levels of unionisation and most often higher levels of part-time and casual workers, whose access to training, or even negotiating training through enterprise bargaining or workplace agreements is problematic (Smith & Ewer 1995). Finally, it is these very industries that are the growth areas in the Australian economy that is now characterised by a decline in manufacturing and 'big business'. Paradoxically, despite these changes, the old paradigm of industry, now extended to enterprise level, continues to enjoy a privileged position in decision-making forums relating to training.

Many of the changes discussed in this section are closely linked with the changing nature of work, to which attention is now turned.

Work in 'new times'

There is now a vast literature in which there is general agreement that the nature, distribution and organisation of work is undergoing rapid change. Most often, such changes are associated with the rhetoric of 'globalisation' and to a much lesser extent, that of internationalisation. While there are many perspectives on this change, and therefore no one easy description or analysis, global trends that are also playing out in the Australian context are evident. Recent research in Australia found agreement around a number of features of the Australian workplace of 2026 (Gollan et al. 1996, pp.1–2), namely that:

- overall levels of employment will largely depend on how Australia integrates itself with the economies of the Asia–Pacific region
- most employment will be in the services sector

- jobs will be polarised between high-skill persons (information technology, computers, engineering etc) and low-skill occupations
- employment in the public sector will decline
- the workforce will age
- *increases in female participation rates will continue*
- the average business unit will be smaller in size
- more operational decision-making will be conducted from the shop floor (although strategic decision-making will continue to be performed by high-level management)
- our industrial relations system will change dramatically, with an increased focus on both workplace level and individual (as opposed to collective) bargaining
- the Australian Industrial Relations Commission will have a reduced macro-economic role, and will find itself setting minimum conditions and handling workplace grievances
- trade unions will no longer have a role in public policy-making, but will find their role circumscribed to workplace level bargaining. Structurally, they will be far more fragmented than they are today
- employer organisations will see their role change from collective bargainer to fee-for-service information provider

Rather than agreement on issues relating to the distribution of employment, working time and income, and the future of trade unions, opinions tend to be polarised into two scenarios, one pessimistic, the other optimistic (Gollan et al. 1996, pp.2–3). Already, many of the projections listed above are well established in Australian workplaces. For example, much is written about working time and work intensification (Campbell 1997; Heiler 1998), the increasing significance of the service sector (for example, Lipsig-Mummé 1997), the increase of part-time, marginalised and precarious jobs (for example, Crompton 1997; Junor et al. 1993; Romeyn 1992; URCOT 1995) and 'flexibility' (Campbell 1997, 1996; Griffin & Teicher 1997; Probert 1996).

While these changes are highly significant for policy-makers, planners and *all* (present and potential) workers in Australia, what is of most importance here is a very brief consideration of some of the gender implications of the changes. For over a decade now writers have been considering the complex and paradoxical phenomena of the 'feminisation' of the workforce (Haraway 1985; Hart 1992; Jenson et al. 1988; Bradley 1997). This term refers not only to the increased number of women working (mainly in part-time jobs) or women's increasing commitment to work, but also encapsulates the increasing trend of more men 'working like women'—in part-time and casual jobs; in feminised industries and occupations (for example, Williams 1993; Williams 1995).

While this may be viewed as auguring well for women, history has repeatedly demonstrated the shifts that occur, when women move into industries or occupations perceived as men's work, or vice versa (for example, Cockburn 1983, 1990). Moreover, a large body of literature points to the ongoing gendered cultures and sexual politics of power in workplaces and organisations (for example, Adkins 1995; Pringle 1988; Savage & Witz 1992). This literature is now being continually supplemented by new works that point to the enduring basis of gender segregation, at and through work, and that the so-called 'new' changes associated with restructuring and globalisation are in fact both based on, and reproducing the old trends of disadvantage and discrimination, in both

industrialised and more recently industrialising countries (for example, Bakker 1996; Bradley 1989; Edwards & Magarey 1995; Kabeer 1994; Walby 1997; Ward 1990).

In turn, the dismantling of collective bargaining strategies and replacement of *individualised contracts in enterprises* or workplaces is further weakening the position of already marginalised women workers. Finally, research conducted over the last two decades is also demonstrating that 'new' and emergent industries that held so much promise for women workers (especially those associated with new information technologies), are also reproducing the gender segregation patterns of the older manufacturing industries, along with the gender segmentation in the occupational hierarchies in these industries (Tijdens 1996; Webster 1996).

In these ways, it can be seen that the 'new' times are not so new for women workers, especially in terms of the enduring nature of segregation and segmentation. Both the locations of 'women's work' and the ways in which women have had to, or have chosen to work, are becoming more prevalent. These patterns hold serious challenges for the planning and provision of vocational education and training in Australia if VET is to redress, rather than perpetuate and recreate the inequities that continue to exist and increase.

Challenges

Two major conclusions arise from this survey of the selected contextual factors discussed above. Firstly, the context for VET is a complex one, comprising many different and inter-related elements, and characterised by change, contradictory pressures and uncertainty.

Although discussed separately here, social and economic changes both intersect and interact. Each reflects—and produces—shifts in the other. Thus, for instance, prolonged dependency of young people on their families, and their increased participation in education and training are linked to, and reflect changing economic conditions and the collapse of the youth labour market. Similarly, there are links between the increased participation of women in paid work, the decline in the birth rate, and labour market opportunities.

Secondly, the elements which make up the context—and the context as a whole—are rarely discussed or analysed with a central awareness of differences in the lives and experiences of women and men—or different groups of men or women. That is, there is a marked dearth of comprehensive analysis of the ways in which the changing contextual elements might impact differently on women or different groups of women. This lack reflects a similar failure in industrial relations research as identified by Pocock (1997b) in which she found the field's research agenda 'reflects men's pre-occupations and views of the world' (p.14). This is of great concern, but particularly so in the case of globalisation, which is consistently presented as the most important of the many forces for change.

While the literature on globalisation is considerable, there are few analyses that focus specifically on women. To illustrate this gap, we conducted a search of electronic databases and some major publications on CD, firstly using the search term 'globalisation', then narrowing the search by adding 'and women'. The results are indicated below:

Table 1.9: References to globalisation and women, selected databases

Database	Globalisation references	Women and globalisation references
Australian Education Index (AEI)	42	0
ERIC	10	1
Family and Society	38	8
Australian Public Affairs Information Service (APAIS)	314	14
Australian Business Intelligence (ABIX)	450	3
The Age on CD, 1998	51	4
Business Review Weekly on CD, 1997	89	7

Although we did not undertake a content analysis of the references, our brief examination of the results of the searches on 'globalisation and women' indicated that more often than not women were not a central focus of discussion or analysis.

The potential for analyses in which women are central to contribute to a fuller understanding of the dimensions of globalisation is significant, for:

> *Women's experiences are a mirror to the future. Women experience first hand the extent to which the current institutional framework—including labour market structures and the social infrastructure—has failed to keep pace with the changing technological, economic, social and political realities. In adjusting their own lives—to juggle labour market participation with family and other responsibilities—they give us insight into where future social and economic adjustment is needed* (OECD 1994, p.13).

Research which fails to consider women is both deficient and incomplete (Pocock 1997b, p.5).

In the 'global economy', VET is perceived to have a central and increasingly important role in assisting adaptation to change and to its successful management (Anderson 1997a). In large part, this role is based on VET's contribution to economic growth through increases in the skills, and therefore the efficiency and productivity of workers:

> *[VET] play[s] a central role in the development of skills, competences, know-how and knowledge that individuals bring to the workplace...Moreover, this importance appears to be increasing as the pace of technological change and increasing demand for flexibility in the workplace contribute to faster obsolescence of job-specific skills, competences, know-how and knowledge* (Wurzburg 1998, p.1).

Nevertheless, the extent of VET's role in promoting economic growth is still largely unknown. Tessaring (1997) notes the considerable research on the contribution of education to income and economic growth undertaken since the 1960s and finds that almost all studies confirm its positive effect. However, he adds that most of these studies refer to general education and very little to VET. He concludes that although VET does

also contribute to economic growth, 'its contribution seems to be far smaller than that of general or higher education' (p. 23).

Similarly, Middleton et al. (1993) indicate that the 'evidence overall suggests that the economic payoff to education is high', but note that 'assessing the contribution of skills training to economic growth is more complicated than determining the contribution of general education'. One reason for this is that VET serves population groups of varying ages and educational achievement and very different occupational segments of the labour market. Another problem is a lack of statistics. Given these difficulties they conclude that:

> *...it is not surprising that attempts to examine VET's contribution to economic growth have been unsuccessful* (Middleton et al. 1993, p.46).

If a major objective of VET is to improve economic growth, then it is important that consideration be given to all the ways in which it might do this—not only through the labour market. A broader more-informed view needs to be inserted into the assumptions that shape the dominant VET perspective of work, as well illustrated above. Further, considerable research has been done in recent years on the contribution to economic growth of women's non-market work (for example, Waring 1997). A major conclusion of this work is that the standard methods of measuring gross domestic product are flawed by their exclusion of the value of the non-market work of both women and men.

The relationship between VET, the skills that women use in their non-market work, and the efficiency and productivity of this work has not yet been explored, but would help to provide a clearer picture of the full roles of VET, in particular in the range of ways in which it contributes to the economy, and also of returns to investment in VET for women.

The social trends indicated here, changing identities, political and cultural homogenisation, the ageing of the population and changing work/family arrangements give rise to many questions which have important implications for women and VET.

At a broad level, what will these changes mean for women? What are the relationships between women and men, work and unpaid work in these globalised times? What are the specific and most urgent issues for women? How can these changes be called upon to inform VET policies? What roles can education and training play? In the changing circumstances what forms of education and training will be most appropriate? More specifically, how will women's access to, and participation in VET be affected by the added responsibilities for elderly relatives? What impact will the prolonged dependency of young people have on the decisions that families make about using their resources for education and training? How can women already juggling paid and unpaid work fit VET into their busy lives? What are the implications if they don't?

All of these issues are touched on separately somewhere in the literature, but thus far they have not been sufficiently explored together. The picture that emerges is thus like a half-completed jigsaw puzzle. Greater attention is required to finding the missing pieces.

Challenge: Improving equity for women through VET

In illustrating the complexity—and uncertainty—within which VET is located, the survey underlines that VET alone will be unable to address the myriad problems contributing to

inequity. VET has an important social role in increasing the opportunities for individuals and social wellbeing in general:

> *Because of the impact...on the employability and productivity of individuals and the competitiveness of enterprises and national economies, vocational education and training exert a powerful influence on the social wellbeing of societies* (Wurzburg 1998, p.1).

However, in addition to VET, a diverse range of initiatives are required to address the social, political and economic structures and attitudes that work against the interests of women, such as noted by Middleton et al:

> *...the structure of the educational system and working of labour markets have militated against the ability of vocational preparation to enhance employment opportunities for women* (Middleton et al. 1993, p.63).

The need for a broader approach is echoed in this comment by Caroli in relation to communication technologies:

> *...European and OECD nations are currently facing a major challenge...if they want to cope...they must engage in a profound political revolution.*
>
> *...they must articulate and probably integrate two types of policies which are usually implemented by different institutions. Namely they must integrate schooling and training policies on the one hand with labour market and work policies on the other. And this is not a minor challenge* (Caroli 1997, p.18).

In spite of anti-discrimination and affirmative action legislation and some changes in social attitudes and behaviours,

> *...most social institutions are (still) shaped around male definitions, priorities, requirements, preferences; men run most of them, if not all. The political and social ideas that rule our epoch come from men; in sum, society revolves around men, is literally 'androcentric'* (Bradley 1989, p.231).

Section 2

At the margins of the narrative: Women and the culture and history of VET

> *The relationship between women and technical and further education...assumes significance because of their positioning in the narrative's margins rather than at its centre* (Rushbrook 1995, p.314).

Introduction

The women in Connole's recent report on women's qualitative experience in VET (Connole 1997) are very clear about what they want from VET:

> *Women want[ed] training that will get them into employment and allow them to participate in careers and jobs which deliver quality outcomes and that are adequately rewarded with respect and income...they [participate]...to improve their chances of employment, to upgrade current qualifications and levels of expertise in order to retain employment and meet personal and social goals as part of long term career plans which might involve making up for earlier educational disadvantage, to change careers or to start small businesses. Some women were preparing for their long term re-entry to the workforce. Women's goals recognised both the 'education' and the 'training' aspects of VET and often reflected a lifelong learning focus...*

They are not content with being second-best:

> *...adult women and members of multiply disadvantaged groups want [ed] training arrangements which acknowledge them as legitimate clients of the training system, whose needs must be considered as equal to those of the advantaged groups in terms of VET access. This means a system which treats women, in all their diversity as central, not add ons. This means ceasing to design training arrangements for young men and then making unsatisfactory running repairs to the system to accommodate women and other equity groups* (Connole 1997, section 3, p.1).

This section briefly surveys the history and culture of VET in order to aid understanding of the ways in which they interract to create the sort of VET experiences for women that Connole's research uncovers. It begins by examining some quantitative and qualitative data on women's access, participation and outcomes in VET. It then moves on to two of the key themes and issues of the relevant literature: an entrenched masculine culture; and an uncertain future. Finally some major conclusions are drawn.

Overview

In the late 1980s, a comprehensive investigation by Pocock (1988) of the position of women in 'technical education', painted a depressing picture of their of their opportunities, access and participation.

Pocock found that women's skills and work remained largely unrecognised and they thus had few opportunities for appropriate training or retraining, particularly in traditionally female fields:

> *It seems that the vocational training needs of many women in areas of traditional employment are not met in equal share in our vocational training system, compared to the courses available in traditional male and technical fields* (Pocock 1988, p.66).

The preoccupation of State training authorities (STAs) with male-dominated apprenticeship programs meant that many women had to turn to the private sector for the training they sought where they were subject to fees. Few women were taking up recently introduced traineeships and the proportion of women in group training schemes and other non-TAFE special apprenticeship schemes was also low.

Although most married women were in the workforce, work structures remained masculine in orientation. Return-to-work courses were few and oversubscribed. Many were offered through adult education and were insufficiently funded. Employer attitudes formed one of a range of barriers to women's participation in non-traditional courses and occupations.

Examining TAFE, Pocock found that it had remained harnessed to traditionally masculine concepts of skill (Pocock 1988, p.xiii). There were fewer courses in women's fields and many were shorter and narrower and provided few opportunities for skill upgrading. Male students attracted a disproportionate share of teaching resources. Capital expenditure was also lower in female fields which thus suffered from more run-down and outdated facilities.

Less than half (41 per cent) of all enrolled students were women. There were also disproportionately few enrolments by women of non-English-speaking backgrounds or who were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. About one-fifth of all TAFE courses had no female students. Access courses for women were precarious and varied widely in funding from State to State.

Women faced a hostile or inappropriate college environment dominated by young men. They were disadvantaged by factors including a lack of childcare facilities; timetables and enrolment procedures; graffiti and posters providing inappropriate role models; male-dominated student facilities; and sex-based harassment.

Pocock also found evidence of a 'backlash' against special programs for women among some TAFE teachers and principals who thought that affirmative action had been 'overdone' (p.86). A comment by a college principal that 'female invasion of what have been predominantly trade areas is rife' was described by Pocock as:

> *...a clear indicator of the level of resistance there exists amongst some senior officers in the TAFE system to the entry of women* (Pocock 1988, p.87)[5].

Sadly, no systematic and comprehensive update of Pocock's 1988 study is available to illuminate the experiences and participation of women in VET today, or to trace the changes that have occurred since 'technical education' became part of a national VET system.

Nevertheless, there is a potential wealth of relevant material in many data sources and research studies. From these it is clear that many of the problems identified by Pocock still exist, and that while some have lessened, others have emerged in response to new and changing circumstances.

The Australian National Training Authority's (ANTA) 1996 report on participation and attainment in VET by equity groups showed that from 1989–94 women's participation in VET, already lower than men's, had declined further:

- participation in preparatory level courses had declined from about 58 per cent to 55 per cent;
- participation at operative level had remained steady;
- participation in skilled level training had declined by 9 per cent to 44 per cent;
- participation in trades courses had declined from 30 per cent in 1990 to 27 per cent (ANTA 1996c).

Although female students had a higher success rates in modules than male students, they did very poorly in subjects where they were under-represented. The higher the proportion of females in an organisation, the lower the amount of training expenditure per employee. Females also had poorer graduate outcomes than males in employment, course relevance and earnings.

Similarly a 1996 report by NCVER (Barnett et al. 1996) analysing participation in TAFE by gender noted that:

- all but two fields of study within TAFE reflected distinct gender-segmented patterns of participation
- male students were more likely to be in work than female students (64 per cent of women were not in work compared with 49 per cent of men)
- women were more likely than men to have received reductions or exemptions for TAFE fees, indicating a more disadvantaged financial situation
- the weekly incomes of women graduates were below those of men—reflecting different hourly rates of pay as well as fewer working hours
- women were more likely than men to have received no support from their employers, other than leave without pay

Importantly, this report confirmed that women's participation was motivated by a range of reasons not stated by men; that while both men and women gave employment-related reasons as being the main factors influencing their participation, women also cited 'personal development' and 'interest and recreation' as key motivating factors. Barnett et al. linked this to gender-based differences in attitudes to study and the perceived value of formal study and also to the different sources of finances for men and women in TAFE—particularly greater employer financial support for men.

The following sections take up these points in a closer examination of women's participation in VET generally and in different settings within the VET system.

VET enrolments 1996

In 1996, 47.5 per cent of students enrolled in VET courses leading to a vocational award were women. This figure is slightly higher than their 43.3 per cent share of the labour force and is consistent with their workforce participation rate. It is also considerably higher than the proportion of women among the TAFE enrolments that Pocock's 1988 study revealed.

Comparison of enrolment data for 1996 (NCVER 1997[6]) with that published in Pocock (1988) may overstate the extent of the increase in female enrolments over the previous decade for the figures are not directly comparable. AVETMISS data collection standards were introduced from 1993–94; enrolments in female-dominated community education were included from 1995; and enrolments in private training organisations from 1996.

Reflecting the dominance of enrolments by women in ACE courses (where they make up about three-quarters of all students), the data show a stronger preference by women than men for enrolment in the personal enrichment segment of VET. Almost 32 per cent of all women in VET in 1996 were enrolled in these courses compared with 12 per cent of men.

Table 2.1: All VET clients as at 30 June 1996

	Females	Female %	Males	Male %	All clients	All %
Personal enrichment	292 124	31.68	97 157	12.23	390 110	22.36
Vocational	629 989	68.32	697 021	87.77	1 354 579	77.64
All training activities	922 113	100.00	794 178	100.00	1 744 689	100.00

Source: NCVER 1997, table 1

However, the 'personal enrichment' designation is misleading in that for some women they serve a vocational purpose as a preparation for formal training. Butler and Lawrence (1996), for instance, find that rural women's participation in such courses correlates with their employment profile, indicating that women are strategic about the modules they choose to undertake.

Table 2.2 shows module enrolments in personal enrichment programs by discipline groups. Both men and women are concentrated in two discipline areas: visual/performing arts and hospitality, tourism and personal services.

Pocock (1988) found that in TAFE women outnumbered men in the older age groups. A similar pattern continues for VET with participation differing according to age group (table 2.3). In 1996 it was highest for women in the 30–39 age group (22.5 per cent) followed 16–19 (17.5 per cent), 40–49 (17.3 per cent), and then 20–24 (16.1 per cent). Men showed quite a different pattern with highest enrolments in the 16–19 age group (21.9 per cent), followed by 30–39 (20.9 per cent), and 20–24 (19.3 per cent).

There are two areas of concern here. Firstly, young women are not accessing VET to the same extent that young men are; and secondly, women between 30 and 50 are a larger group of current VET clients than are men of the same age group. The latter finding is consistent with the employment growth in feminised areas of the workforce. However, given that this cohort of women may be re-entering the workforce after a break, and that their original training may have been minimal or non-existent, they may have special needs.

Table 2.2: Module enrolments ('000) in personal enrichment programs by discipline group and sex

Discipline group	Module enrolments				
	Males	% Males	Females	Females %	All clients
Humanities	13 826	10.21	42 956	9.87	56 854
Social studies	1440	1.06	5638	1.30	7087
Education	918	0.68	1820	0.42	2740
Sciences	1794	1.32	2791	0.64	4608
Mathematics, Computing	5585	4.12	10 335	2.38	15 924
Visual/Performing Arts	29 617	21.87	141 559	32.54	171 590
Engineering, Processing	5855	4.32	8566	1.97	14 462
Health Sciences	3732	2.76	11 444	2.63	15 208
Admin, Business, Economics, Law	3990	2.95	6529	1.50	10 549
Built Environment	7999	5.91	12 548	2.88	20 589
Agriculture, Renewable Resources	5215	3.85	10 310	2.37	15 555
Hospitality, Tourism & Pers Services	52 188	38.53	171 418	39.40	223 905
Social, Education & Employment Skills	3272	2.42	9126	2.10	12 453
Total	135 431	100.00	435 040	100.00	571 524
Per cent of Total	23.7		76.1		

Source: NCVER 1997, table 18

Table 2.3: Vocational education and training clients, streams 2100–4500, 1996

Age group	Male no.	Male %	Female no.	Female %
16–19	152 720	21.91	110 417	17.53
20–24	134 356	19.28	101 476	16.11
25–29	86 265	12.38	75 275	11.95
30–39	145 932	20.94	141 958	22.53
40–49	94 686	13.58	109 299	17.35
50–59	39 807	5.71	42 413	6.73
60–64	6942	1.00	7653	1.21
64 and over	8311	1.19	9732	1.54
not stated	28 002	4.02	31 766	5.04
Total	697 021	100.01	629 989	99.99

Source: ABS 1998, Cat. no. 6272.0

In general, enrolment data by field of study show the same patterns of concentration as are apparent in labour market data. A striking feature is the high proportion of both men and women undertaking courses in the area of health and community services (field of study 7) at the personal enrichment level. ABS (1995, Cat. no. 4102.0) notes that between 1983–84 and 1994–95 the most significant small business growth has occurred in the health and community services industry with an average annual rate of 7.7 per cent per annum (compared with 3.3 per cent overall). Further, between 1991–92 and 1994–95 the greatest increase in the number of small businesses occurred in the health and community services (32.8 per cent).

Given that the health and community services sector is a significant area of growth, the question must be asked why the proportion of people studying in this area in the non-vocational sector of VET far exceeds the proportion in the vocational sector. (In fact, 104 903 people were enrolled in this field of study in personal enrichment programs, and 134 689 people were enrolled in the vocational streams.) The figures indicate that vocational courses are not attracting women to the extent that might be expected given

labour market conditions. They may thus be a warning sign of some deficiencies in vocational courses from women's perspective.

Vocational enrolments by field of study and stream by gender show that women are most highly represented in business, administration and economics (field 4) and TAFE multi-field education (field 12). These two fields account for nearly half of all female enrolments. Other significant fields accounting for a further 40 per cent of enrolments are health and community services (field 7), arts humanities and social sciences (field 3), services, hospitality and transport (field 11) and science (field 9).

In contrast, men predominate in engineering and surveying (field 6), TAFE multi-field education (field 12) and business, administration and economics (field 4). These three fields account for nearly 58 per cent of all male enrolments in vocational courses. Other important areas for men are architecture and building (field 2), services, hospitality and transport (field 11) and land and marine research and animal husbandry (field 1) accounting for another 25 per cent of male enrolments.

As far as stream of study is concerned (stream indicates the level of vocational outcome of a course), over 43 per cent of women are concentrated in streams 2100 and 3100 (compared with 31 per cent of men). These are basic entry-level and initial vocational courses. Women actually outnumber men in two areas. These are 'complete other skills courses' (3222) and the two para-professional areas (3400 and 3500). Men predominate in the operative and trades areas (4100 onwards).

NCVER enrolment data are not disaggregated by gender for language spoken at home; highest previous qualification; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status or disabilities. Thus it is not possible to examine differences in patterns of enrolment for different groups of women. Such differences are important. For instance, a 1995 study (Bertone 1995) found that compared with English-speaking-background women, non-English-speaking-background women are more likely to be in courses which are bridge to further study or another course; are concentrated in lower levels of TAFE training and in basic education and educational preparation field of study; are under-represented in streams 3100–4000; are older; and are more likely to have qualifications at degree level.

Barriers to women's access and participation

Consideration of the reasons behind the patterns of women's participation in VET has centred on the notion of barriers to their access, participation and success.

Many different ways of identifying and classifying such barriers are evident in the literature, with structural, attitudinal and environmental barriers being the most commonly recognised. Evans (1996) indicates that the types of barriers women experience are similar, regardless of country or region, but the relative significance of these barriers varies according to the cultural or local context, the level of education and training and the age of the women. Her typology of barriers includes five main groups:

Type	Explanation
Cultural	Cultural and cross-cultural social norms and traditions which maintain the subservient status of women
Attitudinal	Perceived differences in male and female roles and capabilities inculcated through socialisation, schooling, vocational/career guidance, experiences in the workplace, peer pressure and absence of female role models. Lack of self-esteem, confidence and motivation
Qualificatory	Lack of prerequisites which restrict women's options, including low levels of general education, or skills in maths and science
Situational	Factors which affect women's attendance in courses, for example, family commitments, financial resources, partner support, place of residence, social class and poverty
Institutional	The ways in which institutions make their programs available, for example, fixed hours, attendance requirements, lock-step approach to curriculum, lack of childcare, poor information, lack of female teachers, male-oriented information and course materials, inflexible selection and entry requirements.

(Adapted from Evans 1996)

In recent work in Australia (ANTA 1997b), Golding et al. more broadly identify only two groups of barriers, separating those that apply to access from those that apply to participation and outcomes:

Barriers to access	Barriers to participation and outcomes
Attitudinal factors	Learning environment
Entry points and pathways	Income support
Fees and charges	Family responsibilities
Open training market	Timetabling
Employment factors	
Inadequate literacy and numeracy skills	

(Adapted from ANTA 1997b)

By reclassifying these barriers using Evans's typography, some specific aspects of their significance in the Australian context become apparent:

- *Cultural and attitudinal barriers.* Women's choices are strongly influenced by societal, industrial, school and family attitudes. Stereotypes are reinforced by limiting images of women in the media, lack of exposure of girls to trade subjects at school and poor quality course and career information. Expectations of paid workers are limited by employer and employee attitudes.

- *Situational barriers.* VET options for women in paid employment are limited by their concentration in a narrow range of occupations and industries. More than men, women are employed part-time and in smaller firms and receive less employer support for workplace-based or off-the-job training. Women, particularly from non-English-speaking backgrounds, carry dual responsibilities of work and home. Women have lower incomes than men.

- *Qualificatory barriers.* Options and opportunities are limited by a gap between the skill levels of employed women and men and by a lack of literacy and numeracy skills, particularly among women from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

- *Institutional barriers.* Women are affected by inflexible course selection procedures, lack of appropriate entry points and articulated pathways into accredited courses, inappropriate prerequisites and RPL processes, time-tabling and a lack of course

counselling and of child-care. In the 'open training market', limited public resources tend to be directed to maintaining or increasing places in training courses more popular with men. Much privately provided training is aimed at women, but substantial fees and charges are levied. Some learning materials are inappropriate and gender harassment occurs, especially in courses where women are in the minority.

Women and work-based training

Consideration of women's experience in work-based training encompasses women as employees, as self-employed, and as employers. Much of the published research concentrates on women as employees, but two recent reports (Clemans & Bradshaw 1998; and Kempnich et al. 1999) provide some enlightening evidence on women in the other two categories.

The provision of formal work-based training is not widespread in Australian enterprises, participation in training is more often informal, unstructured and on the job (Billett & Cooper 1998). In the 12 months to February 1997 (ABS 1997, Cat. no. 6203.0), 61 per cent of employers provided some training for their employees. Almost half (43 per cent) of these provided only unstructured training. Most training (almost half of the total) occurred in three fields: 'professional and management', 'trade and apprenticeship', and 'sales, clerical and service' (ABS 1997, Cat. no. 6203.0).

Enterprise investment in training depends on firm size, location and specialisation. Larger enterprises tend to invest more in training; training may be necessary in regional areas where enterprises cannot recruit workers with required skills; and training may also be more necessary where no relevant training is provided in the publicly funded system (Billett & Cooper 1998).

Overall, employers are spending less on structured training per employee than they were three years ago (ABS 1997, Cat. no. 6356.0). However, reasons for this remain unclear. Enterprises choose to invest in training for a variety of reasons including to improve work performance; to support the introduction of new technology; to achieve multi-skilling and workforce flexibility; to improve product quality; and to secure organisational and strategic goals (Billett & Cooper 1998). In 1996 employers in the male-dominated mining industry spent more on training per employee than any other industry, and public sector employers spend a higher proportion of their gross wages bill than private sector employers (ABS 1998, Cat. no. 5510.0).

There is considerable evidence that employers appear less keen to support training for their women employees. Groot (1997) suggests that this is due to lower levels of anticipated returns which in turn flow from women's weaker attachment to the labour force. He describes women as caught in a 'vicious circle':

> *If women invest less than men in on-the-job training, their earnings growth will be lower and the male-female wage gap will increase. With lower levels of remuneration than men, women will supply less labour in the labour market...When unpaid and paid work is divided between men and women, men have an advantage in being able to earn more than women in paid work. Accordingly, women will be less oriented to paid work than men. Further, if men specialise in paid, and women in unpaid work, women's labour force attachment will remain below men's. This*

> *completes the circle: weaker labour force attachment—less on the job training—lower wage growth—lower wages—weaker labour force attachment* (Groot 1997, p.8).

The view that women are less committed than men to paid work is countered by Kempnich et al. (1999). Drawing on earlier work by Kempnich they indicate that women's employment patterns reveal an ongoing pattern of serious workforce participation punctuated by short breaks. This does not mirror the traditional male career path and consequently they argue that women's commitment to paid work and 'real jobs' has been under-estimated.

In the absence of access to formal training, it is significant that an informal training culture can arise among and between women indicative of their commitment to their work:

> *Our discussions with, and observations of, women workers...revealed a rich and almost entirely unrecognised network of structured but informal peer teaching and self-directed study without which these workers could not have done their jobs* (Connole & Butler 1994, p.11).

Analysis of data from the 1993 ABS Survey of Education and Training[7] finds that women's participation in 'firm-based training' is patchy and favours shorter training with less employer support:

- Female employees are more likely than male employees to receive some formal training, but the difference is substantially reduced when differences in employment and other characteristics are taken into consideration.
- Male employees who receive training receive substantially more hours of training than female employees.
- Male and female employees receive informal training to about the same extent, but women are more likely to be trained informally by being shown or by asking questions.
- Female employees are less likely than male employees to receive employer support for external training or formal study.

Wallace's (1997) research on training practices in two settings—a community club, and a large food manufacturing organisation—illustrates ways in which women's access to employer-supported training is hindered by gender-based practices. This research highlights how the allocation of training continues to be influenced substantially by gender-based perceptions and practices that are often rationalised as something else, for example, strength, technical competence, or commitment. These practices have the effect of 'enclosing one group within a training culture and dividing another group off from it'.

In the food manufacturing organisation examined by Wallace there are two main types of jobs, factory hands and operator/supervisors. These are divided along gender lines, but the given explanation is that the men are stronger and more technically competent than the women—although there is evidence that the women's skills are made 'invisible' and that the men's jobs do not necessarily require increased strength. There is also an unwritten set of rules surrounding male breadwinner status, which leads management to target males (and conversely neglect females) for training:

> *The discourse from management...is that women do not want the responsibility of advancement because their private domestic lives make temporal and emotional demands on them* (Wallace 1997, p.13).

In the community club, there is a perception of two workforces: men's jobs and women's jobs; permanent jobs and casual jobs, which are also gendered. This perception is reflected in the allocation of training:

> *Those who receive formal and recognised in-house or external training are those who are managers or supervisors, permanents or those aspiring to be permanents. The strong male ethos of the club and management attitudes position women as unreliable (they may leave to have children or currently have family responsibilities) or physically unable (to life certain weights or deal with security issues) and these attitudes relegate them to certain serving roles for which they do not need training* (Wallace 1997, p.11).

Similar gender-based training practices occur outside Australia. Lassibille and Paul's (1994) analysis of access to 'continuing training' (that is, post-initial training) in three sectors of the European economy reveals, for instance, that in the banking and insurance sector employees have 'fairly wide' access to continuing training as a consequence of computerisation, but overall women are more disadvantaged in gaining access to this training. In the German banking sector, women are 50 per cent of employees; but have 90 per cent of part-time jobs. Unequal access to training is attributed to characteristics of the women workers such as 'problems reconciling work and family', their low position in the hierarchy; and their part-time status. The authors suggest that 'it is easier for men to attend courses than women'.

Women's participation in contracts of training (apprenticeships and traineeships) continues to reflect the gender segmentation of the workforce as a whole—with clustering into traditional areas of work. Though comparisons with Pocock's (1988) study show that some progress has been made in increasing the representation of women and expanding their choices, many problems remain.

Overall, women account for only 12.4 per cent of apprenticeships, most of them in hairdressing (ANTA 1997a). Research by Dockery and Norris (cited in Ball & Robinson 1998) indicating low or negative returns to apprenticeship training for women may help to explain their reluctance to take up apprenticeship options. However, there are many other reasons documented in the literature, including employer recruitment and training practices and perceptions that some work is too dirty, heavy or difficult for women (see Eveline 1995). Fewer women than men who begin apprenticeships complete them.

Traineeships now comprise about a fifth of all contracts of training (ANTA 1997a)—many more than at the time of Pocock's investigation but still only a small proportion of all contracts of training. In contrast to Pocock's (1988) finding that few women had taken up traineeships, women are now reasonably well represented in this form of training contract (47.5 per cent), although still under-represented when compared with their share of the working age population (49.5 per cent).

In fact, 14 per cent of those undertaking a contract of training are employed by group training schemes. Of these, only 15 per cent (3060) are women. They are clustered into three occupations: food tradespersons, clerks and sales and personal services.

While group training companies have been successful in encouraging more women into non-traditional areas, particularly food and horticulture, retention rates for female apprentices employed by group training schemes are lower than for those employed by other employers. In addition, the completion rate for women undertaking traineeships in group training companies is lower than for those in private companies or the government sector (ANTA 1997a).

These data may be indicative of some problems faced by women working in group training schemes that are not experienced, or not experienced to the same extent, by those with other employers. The reasons for this are unclear and warrant further investigation.

In their discussion of VET, small business and women, Kempnich et al. (1999) note that the specific needs of small business for training have received scant attention. The conclusion from the extensive evidence they present is that the difficulties small businesses face in accessing appropriate and relevant training are compounded when these businesses are owned by women.

They present a picture of women small business proprietors as having specific training needs arising from the specialisation of their business; the industry within which it operates; their existing skills; the differential treatment they receive from creditors, customers, suppliers and even employees; and their family responsibilities and preferred learning styles and contexts. The authors conclude that:

> *Women in small business are probably the most unlikely cohort to be able to locate and access appropriate education provisions* (Kempnich et al. 1999).

Clemans and Bradshaw (1998) investigate ways in which the ACE sector already fills part of this gap and how this role might be extended. This is discussed briefly in the next section.

Women and ACE

For many years the ACE sector lacked formal recognition of its role in providing education and training. In recent years however its place in the VET system has been supported by extensive research demonstrating the vocational outcomes of many of its programs, including many formerly designated as non-vocational. Despite this, ACE remains at the margins of the VET system.

Ideally, ACE is innovative, low-cost; broad in content and method; interactive; and co-operative rather than competitive both in teaching and in decision-making. It is also highly responsive to the needs of its students—particularly the women who make up the majority of its students (Gribble, undated). In practice, the research demonstrates that ACE is both more and less than this description.

McIntyre and Kimberley (1997) note that while women are predominant in ACE, specific strategies to meet the needs of particular groups of women have rarely been developed or followed through. They draw on a view expressed by Gribble that women have generally been poorly serviced by ACE. However, they also draw attention to Schofield and Dryen's (1996) view that:

> *...the content, learning style and orientation embedded in much ACE provision generally strikes a chord with large numbers of women, accounting in part for the demand from them for programs delivered by ACE providers. ACE providers have demonstrated their capacity to respond to the scheduling needs of women with family responsibilities and to provide learning opportunities in an environment that women find supportive and conducive to learning* (Schofield & Dryen 1996, p.25).

Recent ACE research shows that most women in general adult education courses are relatively advantaged in education and employment. For those in employment the courses may be performing an important vocational function. Many participants take one ACE course after another, over a period of some years. For these women:

> *...ACE is not a starting point but a terminus. The pathway for many ACE participants is from formal study, following a qualification, to informal study in ACE course, rather than from an ACE course to a formal qualification* (McIntyre & Kimberley 1997, p.19).

ACE also provides targeted programs, such as literacy and English language programs, for women and men who lack education and employment and experience compound disadvantage in a number of ways. For these women, ACE may not be so much a terminus as a starting point and, providing pathways are available they often move on to other courses elsewhere after successfully completing one or more ACE programs.

An important step towards increasing the participation of women who experience compound disadvantage through their (concurrent) membership of other target group categories has been the recognition that even within the friendly and informal ACE environment there are barriers to participation. Four kinds of intersecting barriers have now been identified: systemic; informational; resource; and attitudinal/cultural. Following recognition, strategies to overcome these barriers can be (and are being) developed.

Cost is an important factor impacting on access to and participation in ACE. Though ACE strives to be low-cost, it is not no-cost. The need for ACE organisations to earn income, coupled with a stronger policy emphasis on 'user pays' might discourage participation by some women:

> *To the extent that ACE providers have to market ACE courses to survive financially they target relatively advantaged clientele...*(McIntyre & Kimberley 1997, p.19).

Among the important findings that arise from McIntyre and Kimberley's work is that there is an enormous potential for community providers, such as ACE, to improve equity, particularly for women who are disadvantaged by both gender and other characteristics. The promise of this untapped potential represents an opportunity yet to be fully explored. How this might best be done remains open to investigation.

ACE has a developing role in providing training to meet the needs of small business. Most of the employers who use ACE are small business and a significant proportion of ACE participants work in small business as employers, self-employed or employees (Clemans & Bradshaw 1998).

Women use ACE courses particularly in the early stages of their business development, to assist them in setting up the business. The more established the business woman, the less

likely she is to use ACE. As the small business progresses women are less likely to undertake learning activities in ACE (Clemans & Bradshaw 1998).

Clemans and Bradshaw find that ACE tutors and co-ordinators have a sophisticated awareness and a complex understanding of the needs of small business women. They articulate the intersection between personal and business development; they identify the importance of teaching women in small business-related programs to assume an identity as a small business woman and adopt the small business ethos; they understand time management needs; they recognise the importance of technological familiarity and expertise. This contrasts markedly with the orientation of other parts of the VET system toward 'big' business.

Women in VET courses

The many contradictory experiences of women in VET—the thrills associated with developing new skills and confidence and the frustrations of organising time and juggling responsibilities; the sources of support and the sources of difficulties, are illuminated in Connole's (1997) qualitative study of women's experience in VET. The women involved in this study (from community services and health, building and construction and information technology and communications) were rarely employer-driven, or had employer support. But most expressed strong motivation to succeed in spite of, and sometimes driven by, difficulties encountered along the way.

The study reveals and emphasises VET as a highly gendered culture. The women whose voices colour the report, daily face the difficulties of dealing with a system that ignores the complexities of their lives and forces them to confront values and practices that regard and treat them as alien—that reinforce their position at the margins of VET:

> *...your life is virtually on hold—you've really got to be terribly organised...I feel like it's really based around young boys who don't have any responsibilities, you know and that's really difficult for us as women with lots and lots of responsibilities to fit around and into...*(VET student quoted in Connole 1997).

Alarmingly, some innovations introduced in the VET reform process have compounded, rather than confronted difficulties women face. For instance, the experiences of these women show that when 'flexibility' has been introduced to meet the needs of industries/enterprises, they have been disadvantaged:

> *There was evidence of courses adapted for employer needs, or to fit funding criteria, but the effects of this 'flexibility' was to make their pace uncomfortably fast for participants, and to create complex schedules of attendance...These were less of an issue for younger women without family responsibilities or full time work, but were obstacles for other groups...*
>
> *...what comes through in the responses is that the more complex the delivery pattern within a course, the more obstacles created for women whose work and family lives are already more complex than those of men* (Connole 1997, section 3, p.19).

Particularly in the trades groups, women are still compelled to deal constantly with unacceptable and inappropriate behaviour from employers, fellow students and teaching staff:

> *For women in emerging and non-traditional areas, managing gender-related experiences with curriculum and with male training provider and employer staff, is part of the 'work' of keeping themselves in the course and requires a high degree of determination, assertiveness and interpersonal skill and a willingness to engage in personal reflection. Across all the groups there were suggestions that male training provider staff were better informed about issues of gender-related discrimination and harassment, but that some unacceptable behaviour from both staff and male students was still a problem* (Connole 1997, section 1, p.4).

In the face of such difficulties the women look for—and obtain—support from wherever it can be found:

> *...well I did the pre-apprenticeship year—12 months—which counted as 18 months of the apprenticeship and there was another woman with me all the way through that. I could never have got through that without her there...that was fantastic—yeah!* (Connole 1997, section 3, p.15).

> *I think another thing that keeps you going is your sense of pride and accomplishment in yourself and its really neat...*(Connole 1997, section 3, p.31).

The continuing failure of the VET system to consider women—and their needs—as central is highlighted by the study, which calls for a 'fundamental change' to acknowledge 'equity' groups as the principal 'clients' of VET rather than 'marginalised outsiders. In the case of women, this will see more part-time, low-cost programs that can be fitted around family responsibilities (such as part-time traineeships) and which even those on low—or no incomes can afford.

Women and private training organisations

The VET system encompasses a range of private training organisations including: private-for-profit, industry or enterprise-based and community-based organisations. This discussion focuses on those which are private-for-profit, or commercial organisations.

Anderson (1994) notes that the inclusion of this type of organisation in the mainstream of VET provision has added a new and more complex dimension to the VET system, expanding the range of training places and the diversity of provision. He describes them as strongly job-oriented, offering 'concentrated value-added' training that appeals to school leavers, the unemployed facing an increasingly competitive job market, and employers seeking young 'work-ready graduates'.

To date, there is almost no literature that reveals the experiences of women participating in courses offered by these organisations. This leaves a gap in understanding that assumes a greater significance as private organisations take up an expanding role in the VET system.

Consistent with Pocock's 1988 finding that many women are forced to turn to the private sector for appropriate training, due to a lack in the public sector, Anderson (1994) indicates that most of their 'clients', varying from two-thirds to three-quarters, are women. Major

'client groups' are also school leavers (increasingly with Year 12 qualifications); mature-age 'career switchers' and 'professional upgrades'; overseas students around school-leaver age; and long-term unemployed and retrenched workers.

Pocock (1988) noted that having to rely on the private sector for appropriate training meant that women were subject to fees. Anderson (1994) found that the four commercial colleges involved in his study relied primarily for income on fees from self-supporting individual clients (80 per cent), supplemented by government fee subsidies for labour market programs (17 per cent). Fees for full-time study, which ranged from $1200 to $6580 p.a. (per annum) were substantially higher than for programs at the same level offered in TAFE colleges (about $400 p.a.).

Richardson (1997) argues that the conversion of activities from the public to the private sector generally increases inequality as access to them becomes a function of one's income. Given women's lower earnings in the labour market they are thus disadvantaged in user pays contexts. This highlights the necessity for public support for women's training either within publicly funded organisations or through full funding of, or subsidies for, programs offered in the private sector.

Key themes and issues

From 'technical education' to TAFE and VET: A masculine culture

Connole's stories (Connole 1997) of women's experiences in VET, discussed above, highlight some of the many ways in which the system continues primarily to serve the needs of male students and of (generally male) employers.

The story of the VET system, its development from technical education, through the TAFE era and the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) to the present, shows this masculine orientation to be deeply entrenched and strongly resistant to challenge and change.

Butler (1997a) finds that there were very few 'good old days' for the majority of women in vocational/post-compulsory education and training. For many women, the better new days are still to come. Women have been encouraged into VET and through curriculum and staff development, provision of support, advice and childcare, and changes in course structure and organisation, their VET experience has been improved. However, the major problems of the past remain:

> *The long-standing emphasis in Australian vocational education and training on trade and technical education has not been inclusive of women. Training has not been provided in a manner that has succeeded in encouraging women to participate* (MCEETYA/VEET Women's Taskforce 1996, p.5).

Thus far much of the effort to improve VET for women has centred on special programs—the creation of 'pockets' or corners in VET where women are catered for and made comfortable. While these have proved successful in the short term, and much has been learned from them, their capacity to produce broad and long-term change is questionable. The challenge remains to move women from the margins of the VET narrative to become part of its central story.

To understand what has been accomplished to date, but how much still needs to be done and thus how hard this challenge is likely to be (including how many opportunities for change have been foreclosed or neglected), it is worth briefly looking back over the developments that led from 'technical education' to TAFE and subsequently to the VET system of the present.

The story of VET in Australia is largely the story of the many different people and elements brought together in the 1990s to form the VET system:

> *...the workplaces, TAFE colleges and institutes, secondary schools, privately owned training institutions, community-based organisations and other providers of government-funded VET...(including) the Adult Migrant Education Program and government supported adult and community education* (MCEETYA/VEET Women's Taskforce 1996).

In this story, as in the VET system, 'technical education' and later TAFE have a leading role.

It is hard to find the girls and women in Fooks's (1994) or Rushbrook's (1995) stories of the development of 'technical education'. With its origins in mining and agriculture, and its later definition as 'training for trades, technical occupations or agricultural or rural occupations', technical education seemed more to exclude than to include women—with the exception of training for domestic occupations.

Fooks refers to technical education as 'the etcetera part of education', under-valued and resourced, put down and forgotten. To Fleming (1994) it was a mixture of Cinderella[8] and Oliver Twist. 'Cinderella' because it was treated badly compared with its two 'sisters', primary and secondary education, which received the bulk of the resources; and 'Oliver Twist' because of its Dickensian conditions—second-hand run-down accommodation, outdated equipment, poor morale, lack of self-respect and lack of respect for others.

In redefining technical education as 'technical and further education', the Kangan Committee made three decisions important for the future of this sector of education. Firstly, strongly influenced by the notion of 'recurrent education' it adopted the educational and social purposes of technical and further education as more important than a manpower orientation. This gave TAFE broader objectives than technical education:

> *A manpower [sic] orientation expresses their [TAFE institution's] purpose as being to produce the skilled manpower necessary to the development of the economy...An educational and social emphasis is on their function to enable people to develop their potential as individuals but within the realities of the job opportunities by which they are aiming to user their education to earn a livelihood...The Committee has adopted the educational and social purpose of technical and further education as the more appropriate, without overlooking TAFE's vital manpower role* (Kangan 1975 quoted in Rushbrook 1995, p.253).

Secondly, it brought TAFE into being 'with a much wider client base than technical education' (Fleming 1994) thus opening the way for greater participation by women. Thirdly, it 'discovered' barriers to access—and thus opened the way for changes to widen participation.

An important strength of the Kangan report was its 'legitimising power'. TAFE came to represent an area that was previously largely invisible and powerless and technical and further education gained a new image, a new status and a clearer definition. Thus, the birth of TAFE—of the Kangan era—brought optimism, activity and some funding to support new accommodation, better facilities, student services, libraries and more students, including women. However, it also coincided with a period of economic recession and high unemployment and so from early on resource priority was given to labour market policy objectives. One of its earliest roles was to develop programs for the unemployed and for people disadvantaged by low levels of education or training. Fees were abolished for TAFE vocational education and preparatory courses (Rushbrook 1995; Schofield 1994; Kirby 1994)[9].

Initially, better access for women was provided through expansion, but by the mid-1980s the concept of access had moved from expansion to equity issues and the need for affirmative action, stimulated by anti-discrimination legislation. Childcare remained a problem. Compared to universities and colleges of advanced education, few TAFE colleges provided childcare.

The difficulty of changing the TAFE system led to the development of special access programs (Schofield 1994). Pocock (1988) shows that the level of financial resources devoted to these programs—which largely aimed to assist women into 'non-traditional' areas—was small in total ($2.2m in 1985); differed substantially from State to State; and funding was precarious. Where 80 per cent of funds for mainstream TAFE activities were provided by the States and Territories, 80 per cent of funds for special access programs came from Commonwealth sources. Not surprisingly, most of the programs were short lived and had no permanent or ongoing status. When the cry became 'from margin to mainstream' they declined (Schofield 1994).

By the mid-1980s some progress had been made, but Pocock's comprehensive investigation (1988) found that the system continued in its failure to recognise women's skills and work and provide them with appropriate training.

About the same time both local and global economic forces began to exert influence for reformation of the TAFE system, given its responsibility for vocational education and training throughout Australia, albeit on a State and Territory-based system. Ultimately these forces brought the Kangan era to an end with the creation of the National Training Reform Agenda—and the establishment of a national VET system—of which TAFE was only one part (though the largest part). A primary aim of reform initially was to create a VET system that was more responsive to industry and more strongly linked to labour market objectives:

> *From 1987, technocratic settlement challenged Kangan's tenuous claims to legitimacy and reversed its philosophical emphases: a strong labour-market oriented economy would eventually produce a trickle-down effect of individual fulfilment and informed citizenship. TAFE was transformed institutionally to reflect this; it became part of a wide Vocational Education and Training (VET) network which included former programs located with departments of labour, industry, education and immigration, and private sector provision* (Rushbrook 1995, p.313)[10].

The NTRA developed in parallel with industry and award restructuring and aimed to link skill formation with productivity improvements in order to improve Australia's international competitiveness and economic performance. Consisting of what Pickersgill and Walsh (1998) refer to as 'a loose set of programs and policies', it reflected a view that Australia's economic difficulties and global economic pressures could best be met by increasing quality and flexibility in Australian labour and product markets and by providing support for higher levels of skill formation in the workforce. An emphasis on training was also justified on the grounds that training effort in Australia lagged behind that of overseas competitors—an assumption that was challenged, but unsuccessfully (Burke et al. 1994; Burke 1998; Pickersgill & Walsh 1998).

Although TAFE remained the responsibility of States and Territories, an important aspect of the training reform agenda was its national focus. A 1990 Special Minister's Conference agreed in principle to establish a national training market; implement a system of competency-based (as opposed to time-served) training; to install a national framework of accreditation; and establish a unified entry-level training system (Pickersgill & Walsh 1998).

From the beginning, women were identified as disadvantaged and treated as a special case. The system was seen as 'natural', those privileged by it as 'normal' and by definition 'special case' groups such as women as abnormal in some way, requiring special measures to help them fit. Attention focussed not on the faults of the system, but on the 'failings' of the 'disadvantaged'. Special effort to make the system more inclusive was regarded not as the responsibility of the system and of all the people within it, but more often of advocates for those groups (Butler 1997a).

Nevertheless, the NTRA was welcomed by many women as an opportunity to break with the past and establish a more equitable education and training system (Butler & Connole 1992). As Kangan defined TAFE to be wider than technical education and thus broadened its client base, so too the new VET system was wider than TAFE—and encompassed a broader range of 'clients', including industry and enterprises. The reformed VET system also came to encompass ACE—a sector with a history as long as technical but with a very different culture, reflecting that women were the overwhelming majority of its students.

The optimism of women about the NTRA was apparent in the development of the National Plan of Action for Women in TAFE (NPAWT). Its six main aims set goals to overcome the major deficiencies of TAFE that Pocock (1988) had identified:

- to improve paths of entry for all women into accredited TAFE courses
- to improve women's successful participation in vocational training
- to improve the TAFE learning and physical environment for women
- to improve support services for women
- to ensure that women benefit equally from training for industry and award restructuring
- to increase the participation of women in TAFE decision-making

Under the banner of the plan, a range of projects were developed and funded to assist in achieving these aims.

Women's optimism was renewed when ANTA declared the second of the two aims of the VET system to be an improvement in the knowledge, skills and quality of life for all Australians, with particular regard to the needs of disadvantaged groups (ANTA 1994). This statement of support:

> *...was seized as an opportunity for women to gain access to accredited training, career paths, the naming, recognition and valuing of feminised skills hitherto considered 'soft', 'low status' or 'natural'. Women were cautiously optimistic about the opportunity for involvement, participation and benefits* (Butler 1997a, p.20).

However, as reforms continued it became clearer that the potential for change was not being achieved—and that the new system was recreating and reinforcing some of the inequalities of previous years.

Early on, difficulties arose when attempts were made to apply inappropriate male models of training to feminised occupations and industries. The linking of skill formation and economic performance, which underpinned the reform process, had been influenced by the work of academics and others associated with the union movement—particularly with the masculinised area of metal trades (Pickersgill & Walsh 1998).

> *While the agendas of training reform have been presented as gender-neutral these moves were spearheaded by the metals industry, in a framework dominated by the interests of skilled male trade workers* (Connole & Butler 1994, p.4).

This was consistent with previous practice, for the metal trades occupation of fitter had been used as the 'key occupation' around which institutional processes in Australia, including relative pay claims, had been based (Pickersgill & Walsh 1998). However, when restructuring reached feminised areas of the workforce:

> *...the models of training reform derived from the engineering and metals areas failed to fit, prompting a round of advice and reflection on how they might be 'adapted' to accommodate women and the service industries in which they predominated* (Connole & Butler 1994, p.4).

Opportunities for local solutions to emerge to local problems, for change to come from the bottom, rather than the top, or for effective local innovations to spread more widely (Connole & Butler 1995) were limited by the largely top-down approach to reform in which ideas and directives emanated from the centre. This approach had:

> *...a marked systems-engineering character, with all the features that attend this: the utopianism of systemic reform; the top-down nature of central systemic planning; and, by the same token, a relative neglect of coal-face delivery issues* (Yeatman 1994, p.87).

Having given priority to labour market objectives, the new system seemed to presume

> *...that industry's voice is adequate to represent the needs of both industry and individuals* (Yeatman 1994, p.90).

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Critics point to its failure to appreciate that the needs of industry and students might differ, or that many students in VET were not in employment (for example, Anderson 1997b; Ferrier 1998).

Evidence indicates that industry was unaware of the elements of reform. Research evaluating the operation of industry training boards and the new Australian Vocational Training System (AVTS) pilot programs showed that much of the reform was unclear, or of little interest to industry (Wooden 1998; Teicher 1998). From a survey of employers asking about their awareness of the AVTS and other training reforms, Pickersgill and Walsh found that less than one-third had heard of any given concept.

> *What is significant...is that the methods chosen to implement education and training reform—methods such as CBT, national standards, ASF levels and the like, and policies directed to establishing a 'training market' have now become part of the educational environment...Research shows however, this new environment is opaque to much of industry* (Pickersgill & Walsh 1998, p.7).

Progress toward achievement of equity was small at best, and the commitment to equity objectives expressed in a range of policies and programs proved to be more rhetorical than real (for example, Ferrier 1995). A study of the Australian Vocational Certificate pilot scheme (Henry & Taylor 1995a, 1995b) concluded that there was a major challenge to prevent the new agenda from becoming 'another channelling device whose benefits are co-opted by the already advantaged'.

From their work in investigating the ways in which gender equity was being incorporated in policy frameworks, consultation and decision-making processes, Connole and Butler (1994) identified some positive and negative features of the training reform agenda. On the positive side their findings included that:

- Traineeships had increased women's involvement in entry-level training and given credit for competencies in some industries and occupations previously defined as unskilled. Traditional apprenticeship arrangements incorporating gendered notions of skill had been challenged.
- In previously static industries and workplaces issues on training had been opened up and women had been included.
- Attention had been focussed on the unsatisfactory nature of training in many feminised industries.
- Recognition of prior learning (RPL) had provided an opportunity to name and claim skills and competency.
- Through the mapping of skills and competencies in the workforce, previously unexamined areas of women's work had been named and organised into levels. This had created career paths, a basis for training and a framework bargaining. It had also helped to identify structured gender disparities in the workforce and barriers to equity.

On the negative side:

- An emphasis on defining skills for entry-level work had created new barriers for women wanting to enter or re-enter the workforce.
- Too much emphasis and funding was directed to entry-level training at the expense of middle-level training which would cover the work of large numbers of women in feminised occupations and industries.
- The skills of women workers in feminised service industries and occupations had not been recognised.
- Monitoring for gender bias in competency standards had not been subject to public report.
- No research had been conducted analysing the relevance and effects of competency-based training on women.

Butler's interviews with women in workplaces provided a clear picture that the promise of reforms was not being met. They noted that:

> *The women...have been very quick to recognise the potential of the NTRA for themselves and their workplaces* (Connole & Butler 1994, p.5).

However, gaining access to training remained difficult and there were some indications of cynicism in that:

> *...some forms of the 'new' training were treated with reservations: training could be seen as a sop or even an insult where it replicated or trivialised skills already gained informally* (Connole & Butler 1994, p.6).

Further positive and negative aspects of the NTRA were highlighted in an evaluation of the National Plan of Action for Women in TAFE (ANTA/DETAFE 1994). This evaluation concluded that for a range of reasons the national plan had been unable to meet its objectives. However, it also found that the plan had provided a focus for continued effort to improve opportunities and outcomes for women and that there was an ongoing need for work of this kind.

In part, the evaluation indicated that the success of the plan had been undermined by continual changes in the policy context as the reform process proceeded, but there were also other problems. A lack of data had hindered measurement of progress. Timelines allocated were too short to achieve the outcomes set. Many TAFE staff were not aware of the plan and students and student associations were not actively involved in its implementation. State and Territories had developed their own action plans and priorities, resulting in some targets not being addressed at all. Furthermore, the plan did not set priorities for action.

On the other hand, endorsement of the plan by all Commonwealth, State and Territory ministers had ensured a continued focus on achieving progress even while systems were undergoing considerable change. National projects had proved a successful, efficient and effective means of undertaking research and development. States and Territories reported successful achievement or significant progress of almost two-thirds of the targets they had set and there was a continued high level of commitment to meeting the objectives of the plan among the TAFE staff involved.

Among the recommendations of the evaluation was that a new national approach for women be fully integrated into national VET policies and encompass all training providers in the VET system.

Together with material from relevant projects funded by other means, including some put together by advocacy groups, the projects funded under the plan provided an extremely valuable resource for policy and staff development[11]. Several were concerned with issues and learning needs of particular groups of women: Aboriginal women, women from non-English-speaking backgrounds and women with disabilities. These provided valuable basic information and underscored the differences between different groups of women. Several were concerned with different aspects of the reform process and their effects on women, and have since been used to critique reform, propose alternatives, and develop new policy. A small number sought to improve the TAFE environment for women by dealing with issues such as sexual harassment and providing opportunities for flexible delivery. Training packages for staff development were produced, including on gender inclusive teaching.

The National Women's VET Strategy, was introduced during 1996 as the follow-up to the National Plan for Women in TAFE. The plan takes a 'continuous improvement' approach to improving equity for women in VET.

With analysis of the difficulties women face in VET, the research and development projects undertaken and the effort made towards objectives and targets, the strategy continues the good work begun in the Kangan era and which has assisted in furthering understanding of the history and culture of VET and the way in which they impact on women.

An uncertain future

Changes continue to be made to the VET system. The strongest of these is further de-regulation, and includes particularly, a stronger role for private training organisations, schools, industries and enterprises in providing VET. More specifically new elements include:

- the substitution of training packages, developed by industry training bodies, for curriculum
- a quality assurance system dependent on provider registration rather than course accreditation
- the formation of an industry-dominated national framework training committee
- assessment and reporting against competency standards
- greater commitment to workplace training as opposed to institutional delivery (Gonczi 1998, p.146).

Developments in VET which have strengthened deregulation and promoted the 'training market' have consistently been criticised as likely to set back or halt progress toward equity. Reasons for these views have included the following:

- Private training organisations believe that access and equity is the responsibility of the public sector (Barnett & Wilson 1995). Consequently, without intervention to compel private providers to consider equity, a segmented system will be created. Within this, the public sector will become stigmatised (Taylor & Henry 1996; Anderson 1997a; Ferrier 1998).

- Equity has been marginalised and reframed by the dominant discourses of efficiency and deregulation in VET policy (Taylor & Henry 1996, p.11).
- Although 'user choice' has a potential to improve responsiveness, its strong focus on the needs of enterprises might further marginalise the needs of others in the VET system (Ferrier 1998). A shift to greater training provision by private and industry training organisations which have shown little or no interest or expertise in equity or women's training could damage the modest progress made so far toward equity (Butler 1997a).
- The economic benefits of competition and market reform are yet to be substantiated, but may be outweighed by adverse social, economic, educational and political consequences (Anderson 1997a).
- Competitive pressures may undermine resource-intensive student support services, causing TAFE to shed high-cost programs regardless of their social or economic value (Anderson 1997a).
- Funding regimes may lead to a loss of control by governments over their resource and policy priorities, ultimately reducing their capacity to promote public policy objectives and implement integrated reform (Anderson 1997a).

A similarly poor assessment of the ability of the VET system to achieve its objectives in the context of these developments is also apparent. Pickersgill and Walsh for instance, suggest that:

> *...current policies are predicated on the deregulation of labour, product and training markets and this will have significant negative impact on the levels and quality of vocational and industry training* (Pickersgill & Walsh 1998, p.1).

Gonczi (1998) maintains that the problems of the VET system (which he defines as inadequate responsiveness in TAFE to industry; lack of training opportunities; and lack of commitment/involvement by industry), are likely to worsen due to a 'combination of questionable assumptions, free-market ideologies and lack of rigorous examination of the nature of industry'. In particular, he casts doubt on the future of pre-vocational training in VET:

> *The VET reform process has so far ignored the place in the system of full-time or part-time students who are not currently employed...If the training packages operate as suggested, then there will be seemingly no place for such pre-vocational training...If so, what will happen to those people who cannot get a job, or who want to change jobs?* (Gonczi 1998, p.149).

He is also concerned that the abandonment of curriculum and assessment in favour of modularised training packages and assessment against minimum standards is likely to lead to training only in narrow skills which will serve neither the industry nor the individual.

Clemans similarly indicates that the content of VET has been circumscribed by the creation of strong links between training and work. She traces the emergence of the idea of the 'worker–citizen' to early influences on the VET system:

> *The Finn report, for example, presented the competencies for initial and employability as one and the same as those necessary to create an effective and satisfying life as an individual, that is for citizenship. It is the emerging of the 'worker–citizen' that effectively circumscribes the content included in vocational*

curriculum and, perhaps even more importantly, determines the content that is excluded (Clemans 1997, p.19).

She also explains the shift from institution-based to workplace-based training as a consequence of the dominance of competency-based training (CBT):

> *The privileging of CBT has served to reorient the nature of teachers' work, favouring instrumentalism and technique as the base for pedagogy and locating the site of the production and reproduction of valid knowledge in the workplace...*
>
> *...CBT relegates the nature of teachers' work to a 'support function'; subordinated to prescribed objectives and competencies which are often derived from a place beyond the learning environment* (Clemans 1997, pp.18–19).

In contrast to these gloomy assessments, others still observe some positive aspects of change and potential for further equity achievements. For instance, Kempnich et al. see:

> *...an enormous opportunity for notions such as flexibility, user choice and competition to contribute to the development of a VET system which truly reflects the diversity and complexity of society at large, and which can reconcile the seemingly conflicting demands of industry versus those of citizens* (Kempnich et al. 1999, p.68).

Schofield (1996) believes that reconciliation is possible through the use of 'public benefit tests' and the development and application of clear policy objectives and principles. McIntyre and Kimberley (1997) look particularly to the unrealised potential of the ACE sector to improve equity:

> *...because ACE is community-based, it is responsive to local need and demand, and since it has a supportive learner-centre culture, it is well-placed to achieve equity objectives* (McIntyre & Kimberley 1997, p.17).

However, the research of McIntyre et al. (1997) expresses a concern that the current environment may not allow this potential to be tapped:

> *...the capacity of ACE organisations to achieve equity outcomes is highly dependent on appropriate funding regimes. There is strong evidence that the economics of a user-pays system combined with non-targeted funding regimes limit this capacity* (McIntyre et al. 1997, p.17).

Challenges

The consistent and resounding message of this brief survey of the history and culture of VET is that most of the problems that women face in VET result from their position at the margins of the system.

The VET culture is predominantly a masculine culture serving a minority privileged 'norm'—white, able-bodied, employed, city-dwelling, Anglo-Australian men (for example, see Golding & Volkoff 1997; Butler 1997a, 1997b; Eveline 1994). This includes not only students, but also employers and male-oriented enterprises.

Understanding this leads to the conclusion that many of the problems and difficulties women face in VET could best be addressed by repositioning them more centrally in the system. In other words, equity should be a central organising feature of the whole VET system (Butler 1997a). This means giving consideration to women's needs, concerns and to the complexities of their lives, that is equal to the consideration given to those of the privileged elite of the present.

It is not necessary to indicate how this could (or should) be done. Since the Kangan era, considerable resources have been devoted to investigating women in TAFE—and more recently in VET. Extensive comprehensive and insightful research has been conducted (and is still being conducted) and from this much has been learned about women's access and participation in VET, about their experiences in it (and in its different parts), about the particular needs of specific groups of women, and about the ways in which VET for women can be conducted in order to be successful.

This extensive research forms a substantial and valuable resource. Though some gaps are evident (particularly in relation to new developments in VET, and returns to investment in VET for women), it provides a wealth of information that, if properly attended to, could result in major improvements in equity for women. This existing resource could be utilised more effectively to support and direct real change in the VET system. All that is required is the political will to act.

Section 3

Women, equity and VET: Rhetoric, readings and realities

> *The issue of vocational education and training transcends all other loyalties... it is in the first place a national issue of equity* (Keating in ANTA 1994, foreword).

Overview

Women's position within the vocational education and training system over the last decade is that of an equity or target group, despite their comprising just over 50 per cent of the population. For this reason, it is important to include consideration of meanings and practices ascribed to 'equity' within the institution of VET. The positioning and valuing of 'equity' both as a concept and as policy-driven practice within the national vocational education and training system has shifted considerably over the last decade. These shifts mirror both 'naturalised' understandings of what equity 'is', its perceived significance, and how it is 'done' by institutions of the state, along with the ideological assumptions that drive the politics of policy formulation at any one time. During the period under consideration in this research, VET has undergone rapid and almost constant change, partly illustrated in the various nomenclature called upon to identify the system: technical and further education (TAFE) (prior to the establishment of a 'national' system); the National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA); the National Vocational Education and Training System (NVETS) and, most lately, the National Training Framework (NTF).

This section interrogates relevant literature from the beginning of the establishment of a national VET system, which focuses on 'equity' generally, and 'gender' equity (primarily as equity for women) more specifically. In so doing, associated terminology including social justice, equality and access are utilised to inform the critique. As the scope for such literature is wide, and given the limitations of this research discussed earlier, attention is directed primarily to articles and other sources that already encompass a broad survey of literature relevant to the issues under consideration.

The argument is made that, despite impressive rhetoric to the contrary, there appears to be little understanding of, or even interest in what equity *means* at national (policy) level; that the business of equity has never been central to either the 'real' business of VET, nor is it a central organising feature in the systems or structures designed for the institution of VET. This apparent lack of understanding and commitment is not assisted by the paucity of official policy documentation about equity that acknowledges sources of ideas other than quantitative statistics that have informed or influenced official policy thinking and so formulation in this comparatively new national system. Indeed, much of the history of the struggles to insert meaningful approaches to equity into the system remains as unrecorded oral history with equity advocates and those who work/ed as senior managers and policy-makers within the bureaucratic structures of both the State and more specifically, the VET system.

Social justice and vocational education

Education has a long association with social justice in this country, as it has with notions of nation-building and citizenship formation (Capling et al. 1998; Marginson 1997a). Moreover, 'feminist theorists and activists alike have viewed education as an essential tool for challenging women's oppression (Eveline forthcoming, p.2). Within the school (compulsory education) sector, Reid (1992) discusses three approaches to the values-based notion of social justice including: information about inequitable treatment of groups or individuals and associated social justice issues as curriculum content (education about social justice); redress of disadvantage through (re)allocation of resources at a systemic level (social justice in education); and education for social justice. Shore et al. (1993), while agreeing with Reid about the inadequacy of the two former approaches, draw on the work of Young (1990) to argue that:

> *...a socially just society holds as central values about participation in social activity, expression of self and cultural experiences, and self-determination regarding social action...Such an approach focuses on the relational process by which groups negotiate their interaction and how outcomes of this are reviewed for the manner in which they reflect equitable opportunities for choice and action* (Shore et al. 1993, p.8).

While acknowledging the complexity of debates about social justice, the inherent injustice in capitalist societies and agreeing that 'the creation of a socially just society and acting in it are no easy matters', Shore et al. (1993) advise that most often the concept of social justice is associated with assumptions of 'having'—resources and/or status for example—that can be 'redistributed'—a distributive form of justice. Again drawing on the work of Young (1990, pp.10–11), the two serious flaws inherent in this approach (both of which are relevant to VET) are identified as:

- *masking institutional arrangements that cause or perpetuate patterns of inequitable relations; failing to challenge existing institutionalised practices and so focussing on the product to be distributed rather than the 'deeply embedded institutional processes that enable distribution to occur in such a way that particular social groups are systemically disadvantaged; and*

- *incorrectly equating relational qualities such as opportunities with the distribution of material resources* (Shore et al. 1993).

Ideas of 'justice' can be traced in the vocational education domain, albeit more in terms of class, through for example, the establishment of schools of mines, working men's colleges and workers' education agencies (Capling et al. 1998, p.73). However, as illustrated in the first two sections of this report, the basis of such 'social justice' strategies (also sought in the interest of the economy and nation-building) were from the onset both deeply gendered and anglocentric. As posited by Ewer (1998), Australia's vocational training system has been organised historically on the (neo-colonial) model of British apprenticeships around which male-dominated 'craft' unions organised. Ewer (1998, p.2) contends that 'the equity problems of the craft model were considerable, including the exclusion from skill recognition of many categories of workers, particularly women in the service sector and

migrant workers in mass production manufacturing'. It is also important to note here the exclusion of indigenous skills or labour, best described by Thorpe as colonised labour (Williams with Thorpe 1993). Significantly it was not issues of (in)equity (institutionalised sexism; ageism; and general 'disinterest' in migrant workers) that led to the union movement's pursuit of training reform in the 1980s; rather, the major springboard was the perceived economic drawbacks of the apprenticeship system (Ewer 1998, p.5).

Training reform was a vital part of the three-way strategic approach to micro-economic reforms (deregulation, privatisation and tariff reduction; industry and award restructuring; training reform) instigated by the Hawke Federal Labor Government. Moreover, it is important to remember that the base line for these reforms was that of the so-called 'principle' of structural efficiency and productivity (SEP) (Pickersgill 1995). Within a climate of social contract politics between capital and labour, the then Labor government negotiated an uneasy 'consensus' with peak bodies of the union movement and industry/employers that revolved around training reform (Butler & Connole 1992; Ewer 1998). At the time, and despite the neoliberal tendencies of these shifts, this reform was seen as encompassing the promise of both economic gains through national modernisation *and* social justice agendas. The VET reform agenda rested firmly on a desire for enhanced worker participation and for skills-based career paths supported by a national vocational training system that validated competence (instead of 'time-served'), than it did on concerns for 'equity' *per se* (Ewer 1998). This gendered and exclusive patterning of 'social'/class justice that is so closely aligned with white (Anglo-Celtic) male (trade) workers, we argue, has been perpetuated in and through the 'reforms' to the vocational education and training system since the late 1980s.

Social justice, equity and vocational education

In Australia, there has been a strong connection between notions of social justice, of equality and so equity, including the interrelationship with such liberal concepts and notions of citizenship (Butler 1997a; Foster 1997). Richardson records this interest in equality as follows:

> *One of the remarkable developments of the twentieth century, and in particular of the post-war period, is the emergence of the ethic of equality of the person. Australia largely rejected the British structure of social class and its notions of superior and inferior stations in life. But certain categories of people were nonetheless denigrated and often excluded from full citizenship. The largest category was women...Even worse off were Aborigines and somewhat ahead of them were migrants from non-British (especially coloured) stock. These social inequalities, which ranked people according to sex and race and, often, religion, had prevailed for most of the recorded history of western civilisation. They remain in the hearts and minds of many people today. But now (the radical) official, public and legal position is that all people are equal in their citizenship and have the right to be treated as such* (Richardson 1997, p.2).

As implied in the above quotation, the shadow side of this approach is inequality-exclusion, marginalisation, inequity.

The term 'equity' is used unproblematically in VET policy and planning documents, signifying an untroubled assumption that there is a shared understanding of what equity

means, if not how to 'do' equity. For those who have a direct interest in ensuring that VET both as an institution of the state, and also a public good in terms of education and training, is 'equitable' in all its operations, ensuring that the word 'equity' at least appears in such documents and is spoken in public discourse is often an achievement in itself.

However, as Poiner and Wills (1991, p.7) argue, equity is an 'illusory notion', closely associated with ideas around social justice, equality and visions of a socially just and 'fair' world, most often located within liberal democratic understandings. Such an understanding of the relationship between social justice and equity rests on an acceptance that a pre-condition for equity is 'a background of a just basic structure, including a just political constitution and a just arrangement of economic and social institutions' (Rawls 1971, p.87) —the so called (mythical) level playing field. In Australia however, the playing field, despite our democratic base, has never been 'level'. This is especially the case within vocational education and training, which, because of its historical development (and relative lack of critique of these until recent times), work-related education and training have both privileged and reproduced the culture of its masculinised craft/apprenticeship base discussed above.

The slippery concepts of equality and equity within VET are informed by the above assumptions and historical practices, and are based on a naturalised distributive approach to 'social justice'. The system that has been widely accepted in Australia as representing equity rests upon a hard-fought legislative base, established around international, national and state-based approaches to Equal Opportunity (EO), equal employment opportunity (EEO)[12]. Richardson (1997, pp.10–11) argues that, given people's different backgrounds, families and environments, 'equality of opportunity can never be complete'. However, she contends that:

> *...the idea of equality of opportunity has great appeal as a dimension of social justice. It is a powerful norm of fairness in its own right. Further, it enables an escape from the apparent conflict between equity and efficiency, since it substitutes merit for inherited advantage as the basis upon which people advance and this in turn is progressive* (Richardson 1997, p.11).

The above well illustrates the connections between 'equality of opportunity' and western notions of progress. The hidden 'bite' or double bind in this is exposed by Richardson (1997, p.11), who posits that the idea of equal opportunity '*also makes inequality of outcomes more acceptable*'. To some degree this is extended by the fact that the equal opportunity legislation is complaints-based; complainants must have the capacity to demonstrate that they have been discriminated against. Richardson (1997, p.11) highlights three myths through her analysis of the link between equal opportunity and the hidden 'acceptability' of inequality:

- That differences are in some sense deserved because they arise from varying levels of personal ability, drive and effort.
- That everyone has a chance to obtain the good outcomes: their path forward is not blocked by social or institutional obstacles that confer privilege on some and deprivation on others.
- That unequal outcomes provide incentives for effort and application of individual talents that can have socially useful spillovers. Energetic, risk-taking, determined people create opportunities for others.

Contemporary understandings and processes relating to equity in Australia have been established through this interplay between notions of equity, equity legislation and the state. Equity is both a contested value and a construct developed through the modern state in response to contestation from equity advocates and interested others. The Australian legislation is based on a system of categorisation which is designed to identify groups of people who are 'at risk' of unequal treatment, of direct and indirect discrimination. Rather than seeking structural or substantive change, the legislation is procedural, attempting to distribute equity, both to those willing to complain, and to wider groups through the negative power of the acts. As such, as it provides both a mechanism for positive change, as well as an educative platform from which equity advocates work to encourage positive behavioural and, ideally, attitudinal change. However, on its own, this approach is not enough. Using an analysis by Pateman, Poiner and Wills state:

> *...it is all very well to push for equity in distributive systems, but so long as wider interpretations of justice and equity are excluded, appeals to equity are ultimately useful primarily to those concerned to defend a fundamentally unequal and unjust social structure* (Poiner & Wills 1991, p.7).

The above claim by Poiner and Wills resonates with that of Shore et al. (1993) highlighted in the previous section and which suggests the failure of such an approach in challenging institutional practices that perpetuate inequity and in correlating the opportunity to redress inequality solely through the (re)distribution of material resources. Similarly, the reasons exposed by Richardson (1997) that silently condone inequality of outcomes are implicated here. Keeping these claims in mind, we shall now revisit the framing of equity within the reformed system for vocational education and training.

The two major aims established for the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) as the bureaucracy especially established for the carriage of the new national system of VET, aims which also illustrate the (ever-increasing) tensions in attempting to balance the economic and the social within the provision of a public good (vocational education) were:

- to provide an educated, skilled, flexible workforce to enable Australian industry to be competitive in domestic and international markets
- to provide the knowledge skills and quality of life for all Australians, having regard to the particular needs of disadvantaged groups (ANTA 1994).

This framing aligned equity with disadvantage within the frameworks and understandings discussed above. The groups designated as 'disadvantaged' on the basis of under-representation in the first VET strategic plan were:

- women
- Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- people with a disability
- people from rural and isolated areas
- unemployed people
- people without adequate English language literacy and numeracy skills and
- people with non-English speaking-backgrounds (ANTA 1994, pp.15–23).

This overt rhetorical recognition of equity was interpreted by women as offering the opportunity for all women to gain access to accredited training, to career paths, and to the naming, recognition and valuing of 'feminised' skills usually portrayed and (under)valued

as 'soft', 'low' or 'natural'. Women were cautiously optimistic about the opportunity for involvement, participation and benefits (Butler & Brown 1993; Butler & Connole 1993, 1992). Furthermore, this indication of perceived interest in VET-related issues associated with women and equity also provided a rallying point for those interested in providing policy advice in the anticipation of an 'inclusive' system, and thus, equitable processes, opportunities and outcomes.

Within the first strategic plan quoted above, the four major 'themes' that provided the framework for VET in this country were identified as greater responsiveness; enhanced quality; improved accessibility and increased efficiency (ANTA 1994, p.5). As argued by Taylor and Henry (1996, p.5), these themes 'reflect the contradictory pressures in which ANTA operates'. Rather than equity being integral to each of these themes, it was assigned to only one—that of improved accessibility. Thus the potential for equity to act as a central organising feature was immediately limited (Butler 1998). At the same time an understanding of the interchangeability of access and equity as concepts were inadvertantly promoted. This was an important moment in the passage of equity in VET that continues to impact on how equity is (under) valued and approached. It may also account for the continuing lack of any coherent comprehensive national equity policy for VET.

Approaches to equity

This section utilises relevant literature that critiques the understandings of, and approaches to equity and so implications for equity in VET. Policy shifts and responses are woven in as appropriate, prior to considering key themes and issues that emerge. We have contended earlier that the term 'equity' is used unproblematically in VET policy documents and official texts. While this will be illustrated further in the section reviewing readings of equity in VET, this introduction focuses on the lack of understanding about equity specifically, as a framework for the approaches that follow. The work of McIntyre is useful here, in that it synthesises a breadth of research and literature and also is written from an 'ACE' perspective—as both an insider to the system, and operating on the margins.

In seeking ways in which to insert equity into the VET system through community providers specifically, and adult and community education as part of the sector, McIntyre, in his contention that there are 'problems with the construction of equity in national policy' (1998, p.6) and drawing on the literature, identifies the following general issues (1998, p.7):

- Equity is understood in tokenistic terms, not as highly differentiated and compounded. VET policy in various places speaks of the 'representation' of 'target equity groups' and denies the compound nature of disadvantage experienced by individuals.
- Disadvantage is not understood as localised and unequally distributed over localities and regions, nor is it understood in terms of variations in local and regional labour markets.
- Because disadvantage is compound, localised and unequally distributed, the burden of achieving 'equity outcomes' is not evenly shared across VET systems or across institutes of provision and providers are not necessarily resourced to achieve such outcomes.

While these issues also rest on non-explicit and values-based (distributive) assumptions about what equity is (for example, we would argue that achieving equity outcomes is a

responsibility rather than a burden), the above themes continually re-occur across the literature both in relation to equity in general, and women specifically.

Target groups and category politics

The use of target groups is a mechanism for analysis of disadvantage and therefore distribution of resources or opportunities to members of those groups, is naturalised equity practice in Australia. (The gains in this area are also measured in this way.) Nevertheless, limitations of this liberal-based approach are also the subject of concerned debate. An example of such concern is expressed by Poiner and Wills (1991) who, in their discussion of the use of 'targets' in relation to equity, align target with the descriptor of 'dirty words'. They describe the unproblematic use of the term 'target' group as follows:

> *Target groups are those who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of moves toward equal opportunity in employment, the disadvantaged groups specifically identified as deserving of particular attention. Just which groups are so identified varies from one piece of legislation to the next and changes over time...Regrettably, many...measures are quite literally...'fixed or aimed at' these specifically identified groups* (Poiner & Wills 1991, p.6).

While the mechanisms provided in response to the idea of target groups have gone some way to providing an administrative framework for distributing perceived opportunities to groups marginalised in and by the 'mainstream' system, there are a number of inherent shortcomings. These include:

- Target groups inevitably find themselves in competition with each other (at policy level), both for access to resources and for prioritising on a hierarchical ladder of 'need'.
- There is a tendency for target groups to be represented as homogenous, disguising the diversity and heterogeneity within each category. This in turn requires a high level of expertise when consulting with or for such groups, and the subsequent planning.
- Individuals and groups are often represented in more than one target group, and so experience multiple or compound disadvantage.
- Advantage is neither discussed nor analysed. This then ignores the question of who is receiving advantage of the nation's investment in VET.
- The equating of industry/business with individuals as clients of VET weakens the concept of target groups, and further obscures equity (Butler & Lawrence 1996, p.8).

It is ironic to note the reluctance within the VET system to set 'targets' (numerical quotas) for women (or other equity groups), despite the show of acceptance for target group approach to equity. This reluctance demonstrates a marked difference between the VET sector, and that of the higher education sector, where targets were implemented as an equity measure in approximately 1991. As Schofield and Dryen (1997) report:

> *[t]he question of institutional targets is a sensitive one within VET at the present time. In our discussions with States/Territories, we noted a* conceptual reluctance *to endorse equity targets for women although the application of targets in other areas of delivery and management is widespread* (Schofield & Dryen 1997, p.25, our emphasis).

Target groups are utilised to contain or 'categorise' groups of people on the basis of a selected identifiable characteristic/s, which in this case are connected with their 'disadvantage' or under-representation. Drawing on a range of feminist literatures over the last decade, Eveline (forthcoming, p.6) finds that they suggest women be 'suspicious' (or wary) of the use of category 'women' on at least three counts:

- how it can be used to essentialise women (the idea that biology determines women's past and future...)
- a tendency to universalise (conceal differences between women...)
- the lack of attention to context...

The classification system of equity categories (women; Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, non-English-speaking peoples, the disabled and so on) has been utilised as both an 'art of distribution', and a mechanism of governance to share the so-called benefits allocated for 'equity' with those Australians categorised as disadvantaged, and in need (Butler 1998). However, 'women' are found in nearly all of the target groups identified by ANTA. Moreover, the category 'women' encompasses a diverse range of women and so a multitude of differences. The category 'women' not only acts to homogenise, but it also situates 'woman' in a contradictory space, as the problem, disadvantaged, deficit, in need of state protection while at the same time women expect full and equal participation as active citizens (Butler 1997a, p.14).

A further limitation indicated in the statement by Poiner and Wills above—that groups considered worthy, so in need of 'equity', can be changed between legislative stages and over time—is illustrated overtly in changes in ANTA equity-related policy documents and statements in the period 1994 to 1998 (ANTA 1994, 1996a, 1998a, 1998b). While there were originally seven identified equity category groups (ANTA 1994), the 1996 equity issues paper prepared for consultation by ANTA (ANTA 1996b) identifies additional emergent groups associated with either emerging 'new issues or identification/populations':

- males, particularly young men and boys in the senior years of schooling; in the high suicide risk group; at risk of incarceration; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men; people with a psychiatric disability
- prisoners
- mature-age workers faced with restructure due to structural changes in industry refugees from a variety of ethnic backgrounds
- the homeless (ANTA 1996b)

Added to this list is yet another emerging 'target group'—the 'information poor' (NBEET 1995; ANTA 1998b). Since this, and reflecting in part the impact of globalisation discussed earlier, increasing concern is being expressed in both the popular press and through research, on the relative disadvantage of men and boys in the labour force and at school.

In part this ever-fragmenting and increasing list represents the tensions identified by Bauman (1993, p.5)—that modernist attempts to unify and manage complexity usually result in increased 'divisions, diversity and ambivalence'. Target groups both multiply and fragment. This in turn leads to the perception that equity is 'too hard to do', resulting in a

reduction of focus, a sidelining of equity issues, or more recently strategies such as 'managing diversity', which mirrors the shift to equity being 'equality for all' or 'equal treatment for all'. Consideration of ANTA equity-related policy statements illustrates this well.

In the ANTA consultation paper for the National VET Strategy 1998–2003 (ANTA 1998a) the target groups identified as most at risk were reduced to those of Indigenous persons and persons with disabilities, with a proviso that both groups also include women. Prior to this, the ordering of categories changed from time to time. For example, women were listed as the first group in the first strategic plan (ANTA 1994). In the discussion paper circulated for the 1998–2003 strategic plan (ANTA 1998a) it was listed last of three—with no apparent explanation. Perhaps this can be read as an illustration of a shift in political ideological priorities: that women have had their turn, been 'done'; of populist sentiment, or of the power and effectiveness of specific advocacy groups in putting the case for 'their' members, at a particular point in time.

This then raises a further issue in this already highly complex scenario—the political use of categories or groups. Bacchi (1996, p.2) coined the term 'category politics', meaning 'the deployment of categories for political uses'. Bacchi (1996) makes the following claims in relation to the use of categories (or target groups) for equity-related purposes:

- Categories themselves are not the problem. However it is necessary for women (and equity workers) to be vigilant about the political uses of categories and the politics behind the claims that categories either are or are not important (p.32).
- It is necessary to continue to campaign for 'women' as a first step towards challenging the uses to which that and other categories are put (p.32).
- Recent moves to displace categories (for example, with 'class or 'diversity' models) are, if anything more problematic (p.32).
- There is a need to attend to the consequences of attempts to find a political space for 'women' (such as denying differences between women, and setting 'women' in competition with other claimant groups (p.48).
- There is an important role to play in exposing the political use of constricted conceptual and identity categories. Categories are not real—they serve political functions, inadequate as they are (p.161).
- Women need to engage in the politics surrounding the use of the category 'women' (p.164).

While women and others interested in equity are engaging in attempts to develop a new politics for inclusivity in these complex times (for example, Butler 1998, 1999), such work encapsulates a profound challenge for the interaction between equity, unifying or homogenising groupings or categories, and highlights the necessity to develop ways of working that do not conceal, patronise or contain 'difference' but focus proactively on both heterogeneity and the lack of a level playing field. A tentative example of one way to approach heterogeneity can be found in *Equity 2001: Strategies to achieve access and equity in vocational education and training for the new millennium* (ANTA 1996f) where

women belonging to or identifying with other 'official' VET equity categories were compared with those of men in a matrix showing causes of disadvantage for people in and out of work (ANTA 1996f)[13].

A more direct attempt to acknowledge and address differences within the category 'women'(women from diverse backgrounds) is evident through an approach where so-called 'sub groups' of women (again women belonging to or identifying with other legislative-'official' VET equity categories along with a new 'category'— 'women in transition and other special groups') have been specifically identified and prioritised in the *National Women's Vocational Education and Training Strategy* (ANTA 1996d) and detailed in the accompanying Implementation Guide (ANTA 1996e, pp.6, 7–8)[14] . The latter document included as a policy outcome indicator 'increase in participation and improved outcomes for specific groups of women' and associated discussion about the need for this approach (pp.11–16). This key indicator along with others in the original implementation guide have in turn been clarified, especially in relation to data collection and disaggregation in the work on key performance indicators for equity (Schofield & Dryen 1997, p xiii).

To date, attempts to cater for heterogeneity within unifying target categories increase complexity within a system seeking 'neat' and 'easy to do' administrative mechanisms and market solutions. Given this, and despite the recognised shortcomings of target groups, the use of target/equity groups along with formal systemic accountability measures (for example, Schofield & Dryen 1997) appears to provide the only viable path for ensuring recognition of, and for women (and others) at state/institutional policy and implementation levels within the present 'chilly climate'. The political, pragmatic 'commonsense' of this acceptance is well illustrated by Marian Sawer (cited by Eveline) who advises that:

> *[T]he first rule of democratic politics is never to be seen to be taking anything away from anyone...It is much easier to sell policies that will address disadvantage or give something than to sell policies that will take away something and thus lose votes. Hence equal opportunity policies are sold because they give opportunities to women and benefit everyone, rather than because they take away male advantages* (Eveline forthcoming, p.12).

The challenge associated with 'category equity' is both central to consideration of how to reconceptualise the project of gender equity, and profound, as it is this liberal legislative version of 'category' that 'disciplines' category-based gender equity projects. The use of target groups and especially the systemic use of category politics, has also tended to discipline research, especially in the field of VET. Valuable research has been directed to, for example, older women (Trevaskis 1996); young women (Heller & Paterson 1996); women from non-English-speaking backgrounds (for example, Alcorso 1994; Bertone 1995; Stephens & Bertone 1995); rural women (McNamara & Robinson 1996; Alston 1994; Purdie 1993); and to a much lesser degree indigenous women (Rebbeck 1996; Robertson 1996; Runciman 1994; Sykes 1996) and women with disabilities (Lawless 1992). However, 'connecting' this research, allowing the findings to 'talk' with each other to map the complexity, let alone inform policy is highly problematic. Also, as stated earlier in this report, much of this research remains unpublished and as such is difficult to access.

Much group-specific research has investigated 'issues' or barriers; much of it has been defined as project rather than research *per se* and as such has been situated within prescribed policy (and political-ideological) frameworks and understandings of equity. It

seeks to fit women into the system, rather than transform the system to include women in all their diversity. Moreover, there is a tendency for target group-oriented research (by definition) to separate out spheres of gender from 'race', culture, sexuality, location, context and so on. Many such research projects operate on very small budget compared with 'mainstream' research, despite the intensity of the equity-related research and the investment that such research should make a difference for its subjects. However, equity research findings rarely result in policy change, and recommendations are not often followed up.

This is not meant as a criticism of the equity-related research undertaken by so many (usually) women; rather, it is a recognition of the limited political and policy potential of such disciplined research. While the research and the equity projects are invaluable for the contributions they make to the literature and to knowledge about groups of women, time has demonstrated that this plethora of work does little to disrupt or change the institutionalised structural and systemic inequalities on which the system is so firmly based. What such research does do collectively is 'map' the field, an arguably significant exercise. However, in the absence of an accessible centralised clearing house, quite often the benefits of such work are either localised or forgotten, resulting in repetition of endeavours over time and in various locations.

The politics of advantage—the missing perspective

The 1994 article by Joan Eveline in *Australian Feminist Studies* 'The politics of advantage' is now recognised as a lighthouse article. The approach directly confronts the reasons identified by Richardson (1997) and discussed earlier that 'equal opportunity' condones and/or masks inequality of outcomes. Eveline's 1994 article, extended by her later work, has provided a new language and (perhaps) early beginnings of a new way to conceptualise and so work for 'equity' in the name of 'women'. This politics is of interest especially within the VET system, where women are moving into territory that is historically marked out as 'masculine' and so positions women as 'other' to men (Eveline forthcoming, p.8). The liberal-assimilationist politics of disadvantage utilised by the state, of somehow allowing or assisting women to catch up to or become 'as men' neglects any analysis of power while also deflecting attention from those for whom the system is designed and who, in the main, benefit from it (Butler 1997a).

Again drawing on a wide range of literatures, Eveline (forthcoming) contends that:

> *[T]here is now growing recognition that equity directions fail to problematise the male norms against which women are being assessed, and that a focus on women alone means identifying 'women' as 'the problem'. Leaving 'men' out of the analysis can mean that masculinism remains central but veiled and doubly powerful* (Eveline forthcoming, p.14).

Certainly the survey of the literature for this report provides very many examples of the problematisation of male norms within VET, from the establishment of the 'new' VET system around the metals industry model that valorises the trades and apprenticeships to the concept and political use of gendered notions of skill; attempts to ensure gender inclusivity in competency standards development and assessment; work on inclusive curriculum and later training packages; the very many National Plan of Action for Women in TAFE projects; statistical analyses of women's participation and outcomes vis a vis men and so on. However, very few (if any) of these comprise a direct challenge to male power

or advantage, as conceptualised by Eveline. Many more are the result of 'equity'-funded projects working within set parameters and power regimes of funding guidelines with little power to influence decision-making, or are the work of activists and/or academics and therefore not 'stakeholders' *per se*—outside, or at the best on the very margins of the direct sphere of decision-making or policy influence. A number of such documents have not been published, are embargoed or shelved within the funding bodies that commission the works.

Eveline's 'schema' or response to those who question her about how to undertake political work from the stance of male advantage includes:

- an understanding that material advantage is about power, as are gender and 'race'; recognising the politics of advantage as well as disadvantage and so naming *who* is being disadvantaged in what context
- recognition that direct comparison of 'disadvantage' and 'advantage' cannot be made on the basis of gender or ethnic origin unless the prior structuring which orders 'men' and 'women', or whites' and 'colours' hierarchically is taken into account
- needing an (embodied) vision of women, in all their diversity and ages, actively shaping viable and sustainable subjectivities from within the body of power;
- recognising that the politics of advantage is not only a site of struggle, but inherently transformative
- questioning how much education is itself a producer of advantage (Eveline forthcoming, pp.24–6).

While some use has been made of Eveline's framework for analysis (Butler 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1997d, 1997e, 1998, 1999; Butler & Lawrence 1996), and a number of authors have pointed out that the 'disadvantaged' groups in the VET system comprise about 60 per cent of the population (for example, Butler 1997a, 1997b; Daley 1996; Volkoff & Golding 1998), this has been limited in both meaningful debate and thus outcomes. However, the concepts are directly applicable to a deeply gendered system such as VET. Pocock (1997a, 1997b) has applied the analysis to two areas connected intimately with outcomes for women in VET—those of trade unions and industrial relations. Pocock's work establishes a baseline for the practical application of a relatively new theory/practice based in part on Eveline's work which is highly relevant to the broad area of women and vocational education and training and employment.

Readings of equity in vocational education and training discourse

There is now an emergent body of work that traces the discursive shifts in the positioning, and so the ways in which equity is implemented, within VET policies and practices. Taylor and Henry (1996) examined how equity issues were framed in early ANTA documents, identifying the weakening of equity as approaches shifted from those of social justice/disadvantage/target groups to the introduction of the market concept of 'user choice'. Following their earlier work about the way in which policies 'stitched together' competing interests, Taylor and Henry (1996) reaffirm and extend those findings through an investigation of the general and specific ways in which the term 'equity' is used within a marketised framework that privileges industry and so confuses the identity of the client. Such shifts are congruent with neo-liberal societal trends towards individualisation rather than collective interests.

Taylor and Henry (1996, p.53) write of the 'bland commitment to equity' found in ITAB/industry proposals that mirrors the contradictory positioning of equity by ANTA, including the assumption that the needs of industry and worker–learners are congruent. Their arguments (1996, p.53) that 'the reframing of equity reflects the material aspects of the policy context which pose a real threat to the NTRA fulfilling its equity provisions'; and that 'if equity practices were weak while the regulatory policy rhetoric was relatively strong, there seems little cause for optimism in the more deregulatory approaches proposed' were indeed prophetic.

As Taylor and Henry predicted, and as is well illustrated in the latest national strategy for VET (ANTA 1998b):

> *...the privileged role of industry remains unchallenged and access and equity is transformed to be conceptualised in terms of the needs of individual industry enterprises. Hence, although explicitly stated, goals of equity policy are rendered neutral by their location within the dominant discourses of efficiency and deregulation* (Taylor & Henry 1996, p.46).

The alignment of ANTA/VET policy with marketised approaches that privilege industry is discussed further from an equity perspective by Henry (1996), in a paper that interrogates ANTA's ascription to the 'quality' agenda that in turn influences 'best practice' and the associated focus on 'products and outcomes, not systems and processes' (1996, p.11). As highlighted by Taylor, definitional and procedural issues in relation to equity, quality and client needs are 'political rather than technical questions' in which power relations are deeply embedded (1996, p.12). That these issues continue as problematic, despite their emergence in new guises, is evidenced by the discussions relating to equity and 'user choice' (for example, Ferrier 1995, 1998; Selby Smith et al. 1996).

Comment has already been made about the unproblematic alignment of access to, and as equity (for example, Butler 1997a). As highlighted by Golding, Volkoff and Ferrier in ANTA (1997b, pp.11–13), definitions do matter. As the authors contend,

> *...[t]he terms 'access' and 'equity' are often used interchangeably in the literature without clear definition, as are the terms 'participation', 'attainment', 'success', 'retention' and 'outcomes'. Each term is defined and measured in different ways to give quite a different result. Definitions of the terms are essential if planning and funding continue to move towards measurable outcomes as intended by ANTA* (ANTA 1997b, Pt A, pp.11–13).

As acknowledged by ANTA, emphasis has been placed on access rather than equity *per se*, perhaps as it is a less complex concept, and also perhaps as a result of the locating of equity under the goal/s of access, rather than as a central organising feature of the VET system. In this regard, success has been noted in the widening of access to VET (ANTA 1996b). While this is to be applauded, the conceptual confusion that accompanies the unproblematic in-tandem use of these terms will continue to dog equity policy strategies for women, unless focussed research attention is directed to this area. Indeed, such confusion and so lack of apparent 'equity' results can indeed act as a buffer or excuse for the covert continuing acceptance of inequity as alluded to by Richardson (1997) and the conceptual reluctance and confusion about equity noted earlier by Schofield and Dryen (1997).

This linking of access and equity also has implications for research endeavouring to account for and explain compound disadvantage, where the emphasis of the research may be on access and/or equity and one or more equity groups (for example, Butler & Lawrence 1996; Golding & Volkoff 1997, 1998; Kempnich et al. 1999). Such research indicates that there are no easy policy responses to such matters—there is no one way of 'doing' equity. Moreover, most often the policy-related recommendations offered are not implemented, due to their 'lack of fit' with contemporary ideological or political paradigms.

Recent work by Butler (1997a, 1998, 1999) has identified a number of discursive shifts related to equity and VET, along with the interrelatedness of some of these approaches to the framing of equity initiatives for women at work. Such approaches include: equity as appendage, equity as access, equity as legislative necessity, equity as category politics, equity as cost, equity as efficiency and effectiveness, equity as diversity, and, more lately, equity as productive diversity and technologised equity. For women, the concern is how to keep equity on 'the (VET) agenda' and how to promote equity as an area of expertise and an area of central necessity in the shaping of our individual and collective futures.

The new five-year national strategy for VET (ANTA 1998b), despite high levels of equity advocacy and activism in the consultations, does not specifically identify target groups as such. Indeed, one must search diligently to find direct mention of women in the strategy. The rhetoric of equity groups has shifted to that of 'identified areas of disadvantage', 'many people', 'clients with special needs' and 'particular client groups' (ANTA 1998b, pp.15–16, 25), illustrating again the 'general and specific' use of language about equity identified by Taylor and Henry in 1996. Thus while 'equity' has disappeared from the fundamental aims of the system, but remains as the third of five objectives (in the guise of purchasable 'equitable outcomes'), this latest shift could well be read as further marginalisation or even 'writing out' of equity provision in VET. Given this bleak scenario, we now turn attention to equity for women and girls in ACE, and in schools.

Equity for women and girls in the broader domain of education

VET does not exist in a vacuum. Similarly, issues of concern to women specifically and equity in general must cross both sectoral and inter-sectoral boundaries. Indeed, the 1994 ANTA Mission Statement encapsulating the equity-related aim referred to earlier, and agreed to by Commonwealth, State and Territory ministers included a statement directly addressing this point—that '[t]his mission statement will be fulfilled in cooperation with other education sectors, industry and those seeking vocational education and training' (Diplock 1996, foreword). This section focuses on the first of the above list—other education sectors.

Much of the public and official discourse around education in the last decade 'speaks' about the notion of pathways in education—especially between sectors such as compulsory schooling and VET, ACE and VET (for example, McIntyre 1998; McIntyre & Kimberly 1997), and to a lesser extent, VET and higher education. Given the interface, and therefore implications for women in/and VET, we now provide a very brief 'snapshot' of selected contemporary equity issues relating to women and to girls.

Women, adult and community education, equity and VET

Consideration of women in the ACE sector and the position of equity in this sector (and the potential for ACE to provide both an opportunity for increased equity outcomes for women

and examples of 'best practice' for this), is necessary, given the feminised nature of ACE, both in terms of students and teachers (ACFEB 1996; Blackmore 1997; Blackmore & Angwin 1996; Shore 1997). Such consideration is also significant as ACE provides an important link between community-based learning and 'official' VET and work for so many women. Finally, inclusion of ACE in this report is also relevant in a most important way for women—the inclusion of ACE 'VET'-related data in official VET data bases lifts the participation figures of (undifferentiated) 'women' in VET significantly (for example, DTEC 1997, p.1). These data are utilised in turn to argue that women's access to VET is all but comparable with that of men, despite the many differences hidden under the rubric of 'participation' (DTEC 1997, p.1–3).

Adult and community education continually defies attempts of definition (Butler 1997a, p.33). Moreover, it is not an homogeneous or stable 'entity', but differs markedly between States and Territories. Schofield and Dryen (1996, p.v) overcome this definitional difficulty by their proposition that 'ACE is a provider', that 'ACE providers are community-based' rather than public or private providers of education and training and that 'the ACE sector is a network of community-based providers'. The relationship between ACE and VET has a complex and troubled history, with no single understanding of how the interaction is best conceptualised. Schofield and Dryen (1996, p.1) in seeking clarification argue that 'the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector and the national Vocational Education and Training (VET) system are two independent components of Australia's post-secondary education and training effort' and that ACE and VET interact 'when there is mutual intent to deliver vocational education and training outcomes within the national VET framework'.

While ACE is now widely considered a 'part' of the VET sector, it is also marginalised in its relationship to VET, especially in terms of institutional status, policy impact, and resource differences and implications (McIntyre 1998). In fact McIntyre (1998, p.1) argues that 'the ACE sector is a policy construct which can be made to represent significant symbolic values in policy struggles around the de-regulation of vocational education and training'. Much of the debate within the ACE literature over the last decade focusses on the impact of both vocationalisation, and of 'marketised VET' on the philosophy and practices of ACE (for example, McIntyre 1998; Shore 1997).

This sector is heavily feminised, with estimates of women comprising between 75 per cent and 95 per cent of its client base (ACFEB 1996, p.15; Sharpe & Robertson 1996, p.12) and it is supported by a strong base of women-centred/feminist research. Nevertheless, to date its policies and treatment of equity tend to be gender-neutral, framed in terms of 'learners' or people with special needs rather than women (Butler 1997a, p.33). The policy approach to equity has been more that of equal treatment for all.

A notable exception to this is illustrated in the Victorian Adult Community and Further Education Board (ACFEB) paper *Women's participation in adult education in the community. An issues paper* which engages directly and critically with women-centred issues, including the need for planners to acknowledge and so positively respond to the high participation rate of women, to ensure 'really useful' curriculum for women and to pursue 'equity through recognition of difference' (ACFEB 1996, pp.15–19). The last issue relates to earlier discussion about target groups and category politics.

The paper makes the case that encapsulates the challenge neatly:

If notions of equality and difference are allowed to co-exist then insistence on difference as the condition of all individual and group identity can challenge attempts to 'invoke absolute qualities for men and for women'. It will also allow the development of equal access to opportunity to rest on difference rather than sameness. This is a difficult assignment because it works against more obvious and easier to grasp discussions which can occur under headings...(ACFEB 1996, p.5).

In a wide search of ACE literature on equity research to investigate the idea of 'pathways' for women through ACE to VET, McIntyre and Kimberly's (1997, pp.iv, 13) summary of the themes and issues includes the following which are relevant here:

- Awareness that women are the majority of participants in ACE has not led to a comparable emphasis in policy and research on how ACE should provide for particular groups of women.
- Evidence from participation surveys that general adult education courses attract relatively advantaged participants and play a less significant role in providing pathways for disadvantaged women than was thought to be the case.
- Evidence that while the recognition of ACE by the ANTA agreement has allowed ACE providers in some States to expand into accredited VET courses, thus increasing the number of pathways available to disadvantaged women, while in other ways, the new arrangements are impeding the potential of community providers to achieve equity outcomes.
- Evidence that current ANTA thinking about VET competition policy and the 'training market' presents a limited understanding of disadvantage and pays little regard to the role of community providers and their potential to deliver equity outcomes through pathways.

These findings illustrate the need to allow equity measures to engage with differences (within and between category groups) as posited in the ACFEB issues paper, and in this report. However, it also points to the implications, and indeed the impact of the lack of conceptual clarity about equity in ANTA/VET. Again, the contradictions between a marketised system and the goals of social justice/equity are highlighted. This latter concern is expanded by McIntyre (1998, p.7) in his discussion of barriers in policy to the capacity of ACE to fulfil a meaningful equity role, when he argues that the policy failure in understanding equity is compounded by a failure to recognise the nature of education and training markets. For example, current thinking:

- speaks of a monolithic 'training market' when in reality markets are differentiated or segmented
- alludes to a single industry 'client' when there are many clienteles
- fails to understand demand as differentiated in local and regional labour markets which interact with variable supply of VET, with little understanding of an 'ecology' of provision
- ignores the key differences between urban and regional Australia
- virtually impossible for current policy to project how equity outcomes might be achieved in a de-regulated system, given the current thinking in the training market

Importantly, McIntyre identifies a number of policy 'corrections' available to ANTA in relation to equity and marketisation of VET. These have significant implications for women for three reasons—the high participation rates of women in ACE, the potential of ACE to improve on its equity strategies for women (and others) in its 'value-adding' (Schofield & Dryen 1996) role within VET, and finally, the potential influence that such activity has to enhance outcomes for women in VET generally. The corrections suggested by McIntyre (1998, p.7) include that VET policy:

- widen its concept of the 'intermediaries' who may identify and meet demand for VET to include community organisations
- understand the demand for VET in terms of local and regional labour markets that both mediate the demands of industry for skills and influence social and personal needs of individuals
- understand disadvantage as highly localised and differentiated, and compound;
- recognise that equity is a kind of outcome that can be competitively provided for
- equity should not be inevitably constructed as a casualty of competition policy, or as the sole province of public providers and their 'community service obligations'

Such policy initiatives would serve women well, whether they chose to study in VET generally or ACE specifically. Implementation should lead to a more locally responsive, inclusive and flexible system with the potential to break down false dualisms between education and training, work, learning and life; it should increase 'choice' at local and community levels, and assist in the delivery of learner-centred programs rather than institutionalised or workplace-based instruction.

Girls, gender and schools

There is an extensive and impressive cross-disciplinary literature (international and national) which now comprises a systematic and theoretical/practical (policy) 'data base' of over two decades of research in the area of girls and schooling. Much of the intellectual work that has been (and continues to be) invested in this area has directly influenced public/community opinion, expectations of, and for girls, and so policy and resource allocation/evaluation in the compulsory schooling sector. Collins rightly contends that:

> *...over the last quarter century, since the work of the Schools Commission in the Whitlam era and the publication of its far-sighted report Girls, school and society (1975), Australia has led the English-speaking world in policies and programs for improving the schooling of girls* (Collins 1997, p.1).

Collins, who reminds us that the progress (and success) in this area was assisted by the commitment (including policy debate) from both the Commonwealth Government and State and Territory Governments, identifies some of the early but ongoing wide range of activities initiating reform in schooling to benefit girls these include:

- appointment of regional officers with gender equity responsibilities
- professional development of principals and teachers
- production of good, gender-aware curriculum materials

- support at local level for building girls' esteem through camps and special programs
- campaign efforts in relation to careers for girls, especially to persuade girls into maths, science and technology routes (1997, p.1)

The policy implemented after national endorsement in relation to schooling for girls through the *National action plan for the education of girls 1993–1997* (AEC 1993) identifies eight priorities:

- examining the construction of gender
- eliminating sex-based harassment
- improving the educational outcomes of girls who benefit least from schooling
- addressing the needs of girls at risk
- reforming the curriculum
- improving teaching practice
- broadening work education
- changing school organisational and management practice

This list well illustrates the developmental and informed scope of the work undertaken during the past 25 years in a national approach intended to ensure better outcomes for girls from school education. By comparison, the paucity and lack of comparative commitment to women in an education sector far more masculinised, and so discriminatory in its approach to women, yet no less significant in the interest of women or indeed the national interest (however defined) is telling.

As a survey of the literature indicates, many approaches have been utilised in the endeavour to both move the broad education (policy, provision and outcomes) agenda forward for girls. While it is beyond the scope of this report to do justice to this burgeoning literature, it is important to note the breadth and depth of the work achieved (including the explicit changes in national/State policies, administrative structures and resource provision, school ethos, curricula, pedagogies and regulations) It is important to note that as the VET-school interface is now supported by national policy and indeed the transfer of significant amounts of 'VET' funding into schools and so the school (compulsory education) sector. This shift is accompanied by the delivery of VET-related courses in schools and in workplaces for school students.

In recent years there has been a significant expansion of VET activity within secondary schools. Ryan (1997) points to developments of this type as a response by policy-makers to a community view that initiatives to smooth the transition from school to adult life to establish the foundations of employability should be applied in the context of secondary education. Initiatives in this area have differed from State to State and are at varying stages of development. As Ryan notes, to date it has been difficult to find published systematic data relating to the students who participate in these type of programs, or the ways in which they are selected. However, investigations are being undertaken which should help to fill these gaps, and especially our understanding of the gender dynamics at work here (for example, Kenway 1998). Some of the significant features of women's position in VET include:

- the situating of issues about schooling for girls as integral to education in general
- recognition that gender issues and therefore effective policies and strategies cross any artificially constructed boundaries between political, economic, social/cultural interests
- the recognition of the interconnectedness between gender, 'race'/ethnicity, class, location and so on
- the pursuit of, and use of rigorous and critical research, including evaluation
- a recognition that pursuit of a limited or simplistic solution, is not the answer. Gender equity should be treated as a complex but highly significant issue for the delivery of education as a public good
- commitment from the Commonwealth Government and State and Territory Governments and the bureaucracies charged with implementing public policy and delivering public education (recognition that public policy should be about public 'good' for all)
- a willingness to move on, as understandings and knowledges about schooling for girls increased

The question must be asked why is there an apparent reluctance and lack of political-bureaucratic will in the VET system in pursuing equity for women with serious intent, vigour, courage and intellectual integrity, given the example and achievements of the compulsory school sector? When girls leave school, what will their expectations and experiences of VET be? What will be the long-term implications of such expectations? What equity strategies will be put into place in schools through the VET-in-schools funding, which actively counteract gender stereotyping and take the pro-active position in furthering the agendas promoting excellence for girls?

Shifting the focus: From 'girls' to 'gender'

Achievement levels of (many) girls in schools are used to demonstrate the effectiveness of the policies, strategies and commitment invested in schooling for girls. That women have established 'parity' (in numbers if not in positioning) in universities is offered as further evidence here. Indeed, such outcomes well demonstrate the sense of considering 'equity' as an investment not a cost, a State /institutional responsibility rather than a burden. It is ironic, but perhaps not surprising that the very success levels now evident are resulting in what is perceived in part as a backlash—the 'what about the boys/men?' phenomenon.

The challenge for all those interested in the education (and vocational training) of girls and women is that they not be 'punished' for their successes, that the State not retreat from providing high-quality, appropriate and relevant education and training to girls and women, young and old. While it is often portrayed that girls can be seen to have 'caught up' with the boys (for example, Foster 1998a, 1998b), it is here that the plays of power and difference become highly significant. Similar arguments are put that men in the labour force are now 'disadvantaged' by some kind of causal effect linked with women's increased participation (albeit in mainly part-time work). In VET there is the covert assumption that as number counts between men and women 'equalise', 'equity' is achieved, thus discounting the very many complex variables that confound such a position. While women have a very great distance to go before they 'catch up' with men in VET and in (paid and unpaid/domestic) work, the issues and approaches that are being played out in the current political and ideological realm of the State and the media are of importance.

While this is highly controversial and an area of 'hot' (and useful) debate, it is not new to education (for example, Kenway et al. 1997). As Collins (1997, p.3) reminds us, 'those interested in the education of girls in schools have always been concerned about the gender system which is fundamental to our culture'. In clarifying her approach to 'gender', Collins (1997, pp.3–4) discusses four major aspects of gender:

- It can be understood as 'cultural attributes that we drape around the anatomy of sex. In our culture gender has traditionally been binary and exclusionary
- '...that the binary, exclusionary gender code is not just a kindly division of human cultural possibilities into two types. It is about power relations'.
- In the binary, exclusionary, gender system 'ground rules are put into place, changed, and policed largely by one sex'.
- '...gender is a surprisingly coherent, universally recognised construct in our (Australian) culture at any one point in our history (unlike class, for example)'.

Following the interest in and shift to 'gender', Collins (1997, p.4) suggests that those interested in education for girls and women need to understand more about 'the ways in which students learn the gender order of the dominant culture in schools', that 'the "what about the boys?" message can be seized as potentially constructive. What about them indeed!' (1997, p.15). Foster (1998b, p.8) argues that 'girls and boys are engaged in rather different projects at school...Many boys see school primarily as the avenue to paid work, what ever that may be...Girls, on the other hand, see a range of present and future priorities'. As Foster suggests (1998b, p.8), and in congruence with Collins' concerns, 'we need to understand why there is no clear nexus between schooling achievement and post-school pathways for girls and why these remain so restricted and limiting for girls, even the highest achieving'.

This interface between learning and work, especially given the contemporary shift to vocationalism in schools, is fast becoming a major issue in the area of women and VET, situated as it is now in the interconnecting sites of compulsory and post-compulsory education. Further, the congruence between Foster's research, and VET-related research (Barnett et al. 1996) which found that both women's and men's decisions to study and their participation patterns are different is note worthy and the topic worthy of further research. Furthermore, most fields of study illustrate quite distinct gender-segmented patterns of participation, another potential area of investigation. Research relating to women and VET in the context of changing constructs of, and relationalities between masculinities and femininities in restructuring local/global labour markets and workplaces, and VET programs, offers yet another rich area for examination (for example, Kenway 1998).

Challenges

This section has provided an overview of approaches to equity, and therefore women, in the VET literature, and related literatures. The scenario it paints is highly problematic for women and so for girls. The evidence collected directs attention back to the two serious flaws in distributive approaches to justice identified by Young 1990 and cited by Shore et al. 1993, that is, through the 'rhetoric' rather than through the intent of equity, viz:

- masking institutional arrangements that cause or perpetuate patterns of inequitable relations; failing to challenge existing institutionalised practices and so focussing on the product to be distributed rather than on the deeply embedded institutional processes that enable distribution to occur in such a way that particular social groups are systemically disadvantaged
- incorrectly equating relational qualities such as opportunities with the distribution of material resources

This critical review has illustrated how, throughout the last decade, there have been many shifts in approaches to equity in VET, various rhetorical uses of the term and continually changing mechanisms pursued in the name of equity. An analysis of these changes highlights the lack of conceptual clarity about the term 'equity', and a reluctance by those in power to act on recommendations calling for structural or systemic changes that would see equity being a central organising principle within the VET system.

While an equitable VET system has been an overarching aim over the last decade, with vigorous commitment by advocates and workers in VET, it would appear that a diminishing commitment to equity in the contemporary marketised VET system will continue to present even greater challenges.

Section 4

Disciplining difference: Policy research findings and 'gaps'

Thinking about policy

Much of the gender-equity VET-related research reviewed in this report has sought to make the VET system more inclusive in its operations by means of findings and recommendations directed at both policy and practice (administrative and pedagogical). Little attention has been directed at problematising policy, which is often accommodated within VET as an all important 'given' that drives equity initiatives and outcomes, for better or worse. However, Taylor et al. (1997) step outside this confining approach, and point to a vast literature, across many disciplines, which attempts to define *policy*. Drawing on earlier work by Cunningham they describe policy as 'a bit like an elephant—you recognise one when you see it, but it is somewhat more difficult to define' (p.23).

From the work of Taylor et al. (1997), Taylor and Henry (1996) and Henry (1996), three considerations vital to a comprehensive and useful analysis of the policy 'elephant' are apparent:

- policy-making is highly politicised activity
- policy texts are political texts
- policy does not progress in a linear fashion from problem recognition to text production then to implementation but is constantly reshaped and reconstructed by an ongoing process of modification

Based on the notion that society is comprised of competing groups having different values and access to power, Taylor et al. (1997) argue that policy is essentially political—a compromise that is struggled over at all stages by competing interests. The work of Yeatman is also informative here (for example, 1994). Similarly, but drawing on discourse theory, Taylor and Henry (1996) and Henry (1996) argue that policy-making can be seen as 'an arena of struggle over meaning' and policy texts as the outcome of political struggles.

In illustrating policy as an ongoing and dynamic process which is complex, interactive and multi-layered these authors demonstrate the ways in which it defies simplistic definition. Recognising policy as both a process and a product, they argue that in its embracing of the production of a text, the text itself, ongoing modifications to the text and the processes of implementation into practice, it is much more than a specific policy document or text.

This perspective encourages and supports an approach to policy analysis that pays as much attention to the context in which policy is constructed and implemented and to the 'competing interests' involved, as to the structure and wording of a policy text[15].

> *There is always a prior history of significant events, a particular ideological and political climate, a social and economic context—and often, particular individuals as well, which together influence the shape and timing of policies as well as their evolution and their outcomes* (Taylor et al. 1997, p.16).

For this reason, we have attempted to map equity-related national policy initiatives for women and VET against the background of global and local policy drivers, changing social

values and a re-forming VET system. This mapping, (figures 1 and 2) focusses on the period covered by this critical review of the literature (1988–98); it reflects and is supported by policy research conducted by Connole and Butler (1994, 1995), Butler (1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1997d, 1997e), Ferrier (1995, 1997, 1998), Taylor and Henry (1996) and Henry (1996), among others.

Mapping policy

Figure 1 maps major trends in VET policy over the past decade. The figure seeks to illustrate the interrelationship between the values base, governance mechanisms, the characteristics of the VET system and equity approaches over time (and the last decade specifically). In particular, governance of VET has been driven by global events and resulting policy pressures, including the retreat from the Keynesian welfare state dominant from the 1950s to mid-1980s (Capling et al. 1998). Represented here are many of the contextual elements discussed in section 1 of this report, including the development of a 'global economy'; globalisation of cultural and political arrangements, assisted and influenced by the development and application of technologies; and demographic change, particularly the ageing of the population and workforce. Locally they include reduction in protection for industry; deregulation of the finance, industry and the labour markets; and containment and reform of the public sector (Burke 1998).

The line designated as the 'values base' depicts a shift from social justice to neo-liberalism as the dominant ideas underlying and influencing the identification of problems and the shape and structure of policy responses to these problems. The National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA) was established at the beginning of the period depicted. It was the result of *Australia reconstructed*, a joint report of the Australian Council of Trade Unions and the Trade Development Commission (ACTU/TDC 1987). This was essentially a social-democratic policy response to the emerging consciousness of a global economy, drawing on the discourse of efficiency with equity (Henry 1996).

Since the middle of the depicted period, the values of social justice have been outweighed by those of neoliberalism: ideas of individuals as rational, self-interested and utility-maximising; of competition as the best means of increasing efficiency; and of markets as the most efficient mechanism for distributing resources (Marginson 1993, 1994, 1997a, 1997b).

In the early part of the period (NTRA to early NVETS) the social justice ideal led to attempts to adopt system and equity approaches that would reconcile attention to disadvantage with greater responsiveness to industry. Unions, governments and employers/industries were linked in tripartites, conferring about problems and possible solutions (for example, Ewer 1998). A vision of social mobility was encapsulated in the notion and practice of competency-based training (CBT) which encompassed a focus on skills rather than on formal qualifications and the provision of pathways and other opportunities to move from one educational level to another. Social groups which had been under-represented in VET in the past were identified and marked as 'target groups', requiring special policy attention (see previous section).

This situation was inherently unstable, containing contradictory pressures. The regulation and monitoring critical for achieving equity goals (accessibility), such as State training

profiles and industry training plans, were at odds with the need for greater flexibility (responsiveness and quality) critical to obtaining industry support (Taylor & Henry 1996).

Target groups began to fragment as understanding advanced of the nature of multiple and compound disadvantage and of the extent of disadvantage in the VET system and many new small groups began to emerge (for example, see ANTA 1997b). In the shift to neo-liberal values, the notion of social justice has gradually been displaced. The equity-efficiency links remained, but

> *...juggling the competing pressures of equity, flexibility and efficiency...resulted in a shift in the conceptualisation of equity, from a concern with disadvantaged groups to individual consumer/client choice* (Taylor & Henry 1996, p.50).

Under the influence of neo-liberalism the notion of a 'training market' in which industry would be the principal client, gained ascendancy. Commenting on a 1995 report by the ANTA Board to the Ministerial Council, Taylor and Henry (1996) noted its use of the language of user choice, competition and client focus and its fuller development of a market model.

In this context, industry responsiveness became industry-driven, and flexibility became operationalised in further deregulation. Equity target groups became 'individual clients' individual clients became individual enterprises, and responsiveness to the needs of target groups shifted to the needs of individual enterprises (Henry 1996).

'Quality assurance' and 'best practice' replaced regulation as decentralisation/devolution and deregulation of the system necessitated new methods of directing and monitoring effort and activity toward chosen policy goals. Henry (1996) notes that ANTA 'resorted to the tools of corporate management: strategic planning, performance indicators and agreements and profiling mechanisms', among other things. Thus the map shows the interpolation of the use of best practice exemplars, and key performance standards and measures.

The notion of enterprise-driven VET is embedded in the change from CBT and national industry standards to training packages including customisation through the use of enterprise standards. In moving from one to the other, the idea that individuals might be able to overcome disadvantages which have prevented them from attaining formal educational qualifications but still rise from one level of education to another through acquiring and demonstrating skills and competencies, while also enjoying a higher standard of living, is no longer linked with fairness or notions of social justice. Instead it is part of a grand plan for a more productive and flexible workforce and the achievement of economic success through the self-investment in training by individuals considered competent and motivated to take their place in the marketplace of contemporary life in general and the paid labour force specifically.

Figure 2 maps the development of equity-related national VET policy for women and VET over the same period.

The successive major periods in the re-forming of the VET system, are as identified both in time and configurations and nomenclature in figure 1. Linked with the above are the evolving and various framings of equity, the key policy strategies supported at a national level, and examples of the type of research that was funded and so given priority. Initially comprising a group of strong State-based units, the map shows that sources of advice have

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been integrated and centralised into a federal taskforce, reporting to the Council of Ministers (federal and State/Territory) of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). State-based women's units have almost all been disbanded or re-formed into gender equity units with broader responsibilities.

Firstly, details are given which indicate where responsibility for equity was located for each configuration of VET in the last decade. Next, the changing equity framework (mapped as 'framing equity') which was discussed extensively in section 3 of this report (for example, Butler 1998, 1999) is displayed. The mapping illustrates and underscores how equity has been recast. Values associated with the social objectives of VET have been overtaken by values associated with the economic objectives. The shifting balance between objectives is discussed extensively in many reports (see, for instance Ferrier & Anderson 1998). As depicted in figure 1, the shift is driven by global and local economic imperatives impacting on social values and leading to the weakening of social justice ideals.

The broad directions of policy for women and VET are mapped in the column headed 'equity-related strategies'. In the pre-NTRA period there was an emphasis on childcare provision and on finding out what the issues were for women attending TAFE. Early moves to encourage more women to participate in non-traditional fields through the provision of special access and bridging programs, continued to attract attention, especially during the period of the NTRA. More recently, it has been recognised that many of these non-traditional (or masculinised) industries and occupations are in decline, that women have not been attracted to them despite the best efforts of many research initiatives, and finally that, especially in light of emergent industries and occupations, they are no longer considered to offer prime employment prospects for women (or maybe men). Thus, while encouraging participation in non-traditional fields has remained an important policy objective, it no longer is given a strong emphasis. This is apparent in the *National Women's VET Strategy* (MCEETYA/VEET Women's Taskforce 1996), which states that it aims to encourage women into industries and occupations that have prospects of employment growth and career progression.

The National Plan of Action for Women in TAFE was discussed in section 2. The focus of this plan on the TAFE system did not reflect the developing VET system and the strengthening role of non-TAFE providers of VET, including commercial colleges and community-based (ACE) organisations. Its success was also curtailed by unrealistic expectations and timelines and a failure to integrate State objectives and plans. Nevertheless, the influence of a major recommendation of the evaluation of this plan—that a new framework be based on a best practice approach, including the establishment of benchmarks and the identification of best practice—is apparent in the framework of the subsequent National Women's VET Strategy, introduced from 1996, and in the emphasis in many of the recent funded equity projects (ANTA/SA DETAFE 1994).

Also recommended in the evaluation of the national plan was an 'access and equity hierarchy'—a blueprint developed by Miriam Daley for equity-aware, responsive and ultimately successful VET systems and organisations. Although the influence of the hierarchy is barely apparent in the National Women's VET Strategy, it is clearer in a growing awareness of, and emphasis on 'inclusiveness' that permeates more recent equity policy. This matrix remains as an innovative exemplar of just how equity *can* be utilised as a central organising feature from the highest level of administration, to local delivery of VET.

The development of major VET policy initiatives such as the AVTS, MAATS (later New Apprenticeships) and 'user choice' brought a new set of imperatives the need to insert equity into the framework of these policies and to examine and address the implications of these developments for women and VET. Henry and Taylor's review of the AVC pilots (Henry & Taylor 1995a) indicates the imperative to prevent the benefits of new initiatives from being co-opted by those already advantaged in the VET system. But it also shows how the commitment to equity expressed in policy documents proved to be more, in practice, rhetorical than real in practice (see also Ferrier 1995, 1998).

The National Women's VET Strategy was released close to the publication of ANTA's equity strategy—*Equity 2001* (ANTA 1996f). However, there is no marked cross-referencing between the two documents, even though 'women' are identified as an under-represented group in VET in *Equity 2001*. Nevertheless there are similarities between their general approaches. Both reports show the influence of the strengthening broad policy emphasis on target-setting, benchmarking and 'best practice' measures of quality. Both set out target outcomes and strategies for achieving these outcomes—although the outcomes set in the women's strategy are fewer and broader than those in *Equity 2001*—probably a lesson learned from the experience of NPAWT.

ANTA's *Equity 2001* demonstrates a confusion in equity policy—a groups/individuals dilemma. Although its general introduction refers to under-represented groups, elsewhere the document focuses on individuals. Terms are used confusingly, and interchangeably—individuals, clients, client groups, equity target groups and even individual client groups.

In the present era, and looking toward the future, three policy directions are indicated: use of key performance measures and indicators; a 'training culture' and 'lifelong learning'. Schofield and Dryen (1997) have undertaken substantial work on key performance measures in relation to women in VET in Australia. Their report on *Equity performance measures for women in VET* sets out three purposes of these measures:

- public accountability
- resource allocation
- performance improvement (Schofield & Dryen 1997, p.29).

These purposes together reflect Henry's (1996) analysis of the use by policy-making bodies of such measures to replace regulation as a means of directing and monitoring effort and activity toward chosen policy goals in a deregulated environment.

Included as an appendix to their report, Schofield and Dryen's review of the literature on performance measures covers a substantial number of reports from State, national and international sources. It thus indicates that extensive activity has been undertaken in considering and constructing appropriate measures, both within Australia and elsewhere. Four main types of indicators appear to be commonly used:

- *access measures*—usually compares participation by specified group against the composition of the relevant population
- *participation measures*—enrolment data
- *outcome measures*—graduate satisfaction and destination data
- *output measures*—module load completion data

The review ends with an important caution, drawn from work in three international development agencies (the United Nations Development Programme, the World Bank and the International Labour Organisation):

- that incremental change runs a very real risk of addressing equity for women without effecting any real change
- if new performance measures for VET are not constructed to also measure equity for women, then all measures of equity initiatives will not produce equitable outcomes for women in VET

Schofield and Dryen note that this work advocates a more 'pro-active approach' which sets the agenda for priorities and strategic intervention.

The row named 'project-policy links' notes the main types of women's projects funded within VET (excluding DEET/YA-funded projects). The separation of labour market policy from VET policy, which occurred when ANTA was established, has not been helpful to women. The need for a more integrated policy approach was discussed in section 1 and will be briefly addressed again, below. All projects have contributed to (and continue to contribute to) the development of what is now a very substantial knowledge base about women and VET—and about ways in which equity for women can be achieved.

In recent years, many of these projects have aimed to demonstrate 'best-practice exemplars' (Henry 1996) and identify critical factors necessary for achieving equity successes. This tight focus is indicative of a concern by funding bodies to maximise the 'value' obtained from their investment in equity projects by producing findings that have immediate practical application, particularly at the local level. As will be discussed in our section on research findings and gaps, this has resulted in a failure to investigate and address broader (and more entrenched) systemic causes of inequity.

Consistent in all periods have been projects which investigate 'how to do' some aspect of equity, for example, set up and manage a successful program for women in a non-traditional field, or Aboriginal women in a remote community etc. Also consistent are a range of staff development projects: encouraging gender-free curriculum development and teaching practice, more women to take on leadership roles in VET and so on.

Figure 1: Australian vocational education and training 1991–99

Year	Pre-NTRA	1991	1994	1996	1998	1999
Values base	**Social justice**	→ **Neoliberalism** →				
Governance	welfare state	→ neocorporate state				
Key characteristics:		globalisation - deregulation - new managerialism - privatisation - marketisation - user pays...				
Accountability:		total quality management (TQM) - benchmarking - best practice performance indicators - key performance measures and indicators.....				
VET system		**National Training Reform Agenda (NTRA)**	**National VET system (NVETS)**		**National Training Framework (NTF)**	
Role of governments, unions, industry		Tripartite consensus	Industry driven		Industry led Enterprise focus	
Funding and provision		Predominantly public provision	Training markets—competition between public and private providers for funds and students		Expanding private provision Growing emphasis on individual investment	
Content base		Competency-based training			Training packages replace curriculum	
		National industry standards →			Mix of industry and enterprise standards	
Equity approaches		Target groups	Fragmentation and multiplication of target groups	Individualisation and user choice	Equal treatment for all Recognising and managing diversity	

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Figure 2: Equity policy performance matrix for Australian vocational education and training 1991–99

	Pre-NTRA	*NTRA*	*NTRA–NVETS*	*NVETS–NTF*	*NTF*
Equity policy responsibility	Strong State-based women's units	· Establishment of ANTA, separation of VET policy (ANTA) from labour market/employment policy (DEET) · Private providers expected to assume equity responsibility with State role model	VEET Women's Advisory Taskforce. Diverse membership but selective; constrained brief and convoluted procedures for reporting/recommending	MCEETYA VEET Women's Taskforce. Equity units in TAFE and wider public sector disbanded or re-cast as 'diversity' units	
Framing equity	Equity as legislative necessity Equity as expertise	Equity as efficiency and effectiveness Equity as appendage →	Equity as category politics Equity as cost →	Equity as equal treatment for all	Equity as productive diversity Technologised equity
Equity-related strategies	· Special access programs women's participation in non-traditional areas. · Small projects investigating women's issues (e.g. childcare, timetabling, fees)	· National Plan of Action for women in TAFE (NPAWT) · Evaluation of NPAWT recommended equity hierarchy and best practice approach	· Inclusive curriculum—gender agenda · Equity in AVTS and MAATS · Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) issues and pathways · Performance indicators	· National Women's VET Strategy: continuous improvement · ANTA: *Equity 2000–2001*: credible and measurable outcomes	· ANTA *Achieving equitable outcomes* · Responding to diversity in a training market · Key performance measures and indicators
Project–policy links	Commonwealth funded, but State administered	· NPAWT—establish a knowledge base: map participation; investigate barriers and needs; develop gender-inclusive standards, staff development programs · No direct national policy connection, but local impact	· National focus · Benchmarking and best practice · Professional development	· ANTA/MCEETYA–VEET Women's Taskforce—best practice, staff development · ANTA—inform policy and strategy formation and implementation	· ANTA—demonstration programs; mapping and evaluation (stocktakes projects) · MCEETYA–VEET Women's Taskforce—what works for women, public relations and marketing to women, management and leadership · NCVER: reviews

Conclusion: Research findings and gaps

Throughout this literature review we have been confronted continually by the vast amount of research which has been undertaken in relation to women and vocational education and training. As stated earlier, much remains unpublished, authors' names are obscured on many publications and makes material difficult to locate. Despite these difficulties, what is obvious is that there now exists a substantial body of knowledge in relation to 'women and VET', covering the whole range of issues, from macro to micro, policy to practice, global to national to local. Such works also cover the range of possibilities for research—they are quantitative and qualitative, critical and descriptive, problem-solving or future-oriented, cross-sectoral and cross/multidisciplinary in approach. As we also pointed out, many are project-based, designed to support policy in place. Similarly, there is an extensive range of official government documents that focus on equity in general, and equity for women, especially since the beginning of this decade.

Given the plethora of this work, why the lack of substantive change for women? Henry (1996) suggests that:

> *...[r]easons for slow progress are complex, some to do with structural and cultural factors embedded in the social fabric—for example, the gendered nature of work, the legacy of colonialism—and some to do more with the workings of the policies themselves (though those two levels are related)* (Henry 1996, p.2).

Drawing on a wide range of research, Henry (1996, pp.3–4) identifies both macro and micro factors associated with lack of progress for women. At the macro level she identifies structural and cultural factors such as the gendered nature of work, the legacy of colonialism and the workings of the policies themselves.

At the micro level are:

- lack of expertise about recruitment and selection processes for encouraging participation
- the failure of equity to be seen as a legitimate area of expertise in representation on key decision-making committees
- inappropriate training materials
- inadequate support systems to assist student retention
- failure of some workers to perceive a need for training
- lack of understanding of and support for access and equity aspects of training reforms
- entrenched traditional attitudes
- inadequate monitoring and evaluation

Henry (1996, p.4) uses this range of well-documented factors to claim that although 'there is a substantial knowledge base in relation to equity matters', the key challenges that remain are the need:

- to move from formal to substantive equity
- to move from best practices exemplars to systemic change

These two therefore, remain as the crucial issues in relation to women and VET and are yet to be resolved. They are intimately connected with policy formulation and also with policy implementation, the sites of so much women-centred project work and research in the last decade. Such insights are assisted by viewing policy-making and implementation not as neutral sites, but as highly contested and deeply political—sites of struggle between competing interests and agendas, where the resulting 'policy texts represent the outcome of political struggles over meaning' (Henry 1996, p.7). Indeed, Henry (1996, p.5) identifies three interrelated aspects of VET policy work that are of special relevance for women, and for equity—contextual factors, the top-down, bottom-up conundrum and the impact of competing interests and discourses on policy outcomes.

While these factors have been addressed throughout this review, the latter is worthy of further mention here. Continually, research reports and literature covered in this review have included policy-related recommendations, either direct or indirect. There is little apparent evidence of such recommendations being 'listened to' with real interest by 'mainstream' policy-makers, as evidenced by the repetitive nature of many of the recommendations. Rather, most often they are 'noted' at the best, or quietly ignored/shelved at the worst. This then leads us to consider the work of Bacchi (1998, p.9) who has developed an approach to policy which she frames as 'What's the problem? (represented to be)'.

Bacchi (1998) argues that:

> *...any policy proposal necessarily contains an in-built problem representation and...this representation is crucial to understanding the impact of the proposal...Similarly, every policy proposal has housed within it presuppositions about the nature and cause of the 'problem' it presents itself as addressing...in effect, the problem takes shape within the proposal; it does not stand outside it* (Bacchi 1998, p.9).

This approach provides a powerful way into VET policy 'dilemmas' for women, as it makes room for questions such as: 'What is the problem represented to be? What presuppositions are implied or taken for granted in different representations of the problem? And what effects are connected to different representations of the problem?' (Bacchi 1998, pp.10–11). In relation to VET policy, we often hear talk of 'the women problem' or 'what can we do with the women?'. In these ways, women are framed as both outside (real) policy interests but also internal to them, as a 'bother' or an irritant not connected with the real game/core business of VET. The 'problem' is then approached about how to 'fit women in' (consider for example, the very many research projects around women in non-traditional areas, or how-to-do women in policy and practice). The problem is *not* that the system and structures privilege (some) men, that they are phallo-centic.

This approach to women, and to equity through distributive mechanisms that fail to challenge, let alone transform mainstream policies or practices, that do not centre 'equity'

as a central organising feature, then act to 'discipline' unruly differences characterises the position of women in VET today. In short, such practices act to make women like 'men'; indigenous peoples or those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds like Anglo-Australians; people living in rural and remote Australia like their urban counterparts, and so on. This then leaves a critical role for research, and for policy that indicates the political will, integrity and maturity to be informed by critical research.

Within this framework, we now indicate briefly some emerging 'gaps' in specific areas, for research around women and VET, with the proviso that any such research, including funded research, should 'map' rather than 'mop' (up); be proactive more than reactive; critical rather than designed to support the status quo (or contain dangerous ideas); prescriptive as well as descriptive and within this, cover the gamut of opportunities for research considered to be 'VET-related', of which most if not all, is relevant to, and for women as participants and stakeholders in VET in Australia at this time.

Themes

The following are offered as suggestions for consideration for research. Before so doing, we also note the urgent need for the establishment of a funded and accessible 'mainstream' collection point, archive and clearing house for research that covers the broad area of 'women and VET'. These issues have been gathered together throughout the process of undertaking the critical literature review that forms the basis of this report. As they relate to matters that often cross sections of the report, we have not attempted to append them to individual sections; rather, they have been categorised into relevant themes. We reiterate that these comments are not presented as a prescriptive or definitive list for research directions. We hope that they will provide a platform for ongoing conversations and effective research activities, to shape an inclusive and participative VET community and sector in this country.

Globalisation and change

- this area encompasses the changing nature, organisation and distribution of work; the 'feminisation' of work
- interrelationships between global/local, and labour market and vocational education and training implications for women
- the 'imperative' of change in VET—a gender analysis
- the continuation of enduring patterns of segregation and emerging new divisions
- shifts in concepts of knowledges, skills and training for work for women
- the role of the state, and equity for women
- we also argue strongly for an updating of the work undertaken by Pocock (1987a, 1987b; 1988, 1992), as a major research project

Social, cultural and demographic changes

- such work could link contemporary and emergent research into a wide range of areas, and consider the implications of such work for women, and for VET

- changing identities, political and cultural 'homogenisation', ageing of workforces, the marginalisation of youth, changing work/family relationships, changing patterns and locations of 'class'—and implications for/impact on women and VET
- the role of VET in creating social capital

Policies, politics and VET

- changing shapes of institutions of the state, and implications for women and VET. This could include 'big picture' research of significance to women, including the interrelationships between other sectors, disparate policies that need connecting (for example, industry policy, economic policy, social policies, industrial relations, rural and regions development)
- policy-making processes and outcomes within VET, including analyses that consider issues related to politics, privilege and power
- the positioning of equity within VET could also well be located here (as in any of the other categories)
- consultation that counts/ makes a difference for women

Marketisation of VET

- regulation/deregulation, and implications for women/equity groups; the interrelationships between markets and equity contracts; the implications of national 'market' policies and practices for local practices
- feminist/women friendly economics and VET
- the relationships between accountability, measurement and equity
- policy and practice accountability for women as clients of VET
- issues, future trends, problematics

Economic and social policies and practices for VET

- the role of women in economic and social development
- the interplay between paid and unpaid work in the labour force and VET
- VET, women and sustainable economic and social growth
- compound disadvantage, women and VET
- the interrelations between social, cultural and economic capital, women and VET
- women, intellectual capital and VET
- futures for women in and through VET

Gender issues in VET

- structural and systemic transformation of the institution of VET to inclusivity rather than exclusivity; a gender analysis of the structures and systems of VET bureaucracies
- conceptual/policy frameworks for equity, women and VET
- equity, difference/s and public goods in VET
- relationality between advantage and disadvantage; men and women
- differences and diversity within VET
- shifting to 'equity imperatives' as well as 'economic imperatives'

- the shifting interrelationships between masculinities and femininities in VET
- the relationships between VET for women and girls in schools, ACE, post-compulsory education and work
- men, masculinities and VET
- while not identifying particular issues associated with 'practice' or policy critique and formulation, we urge that this work be continued, but funded and valued equally with 'mainstream' VET research

Curriculum, pedagogies and practices in VET

- This continues as a significant area for ongoing women-centred and feminist research, much of which has already established a significant 'baseline' for on-going critical work

Australian VET large and small research grants

- We strongly argue for the establishment of the VET equivalent of the ARC research scheme implemented through the higher education sector, to enhance a research culture concerned with knowledge growth and innovation in VET, and that such grants should include gender-related and gender-inclusive research.

- We argue that the 'confined' nature of much research in VET, that is that so much research has its focus or topic 'prescribed' in advance, both disciplines the research, disadvantages gender-related work, and acts against a vigorous, knowledge-seeking and inclusive culture in VET.

In conclusion

The histories of women, work and vocational education and training in Australia are relatively recent, but carry the significant influences of earlier times and other places.

Though the continuing story of women and VET is now being rewritten by new forces, many of which are linked to ongoing economic, social and political globalisation, our analysis of the literature reveals that for the most part, the patterns of marginalisation that marked the past continue to endure. For us, the continuation of these patterns is particularly disappointing because the literature also provides clear evidence that understandings of equity continue to grow and deepen, as does knowledge of effective approaches to its many dilemmas.

We are reassured, however, by the evidence that women are becoming increasingly pro-active in voicing their requirements for, and creating, equitable vocational education and training. Their enthusiasm for the task, and their commitment to the achievement of change, will ultimately we are sure, impact on, and permeate through, all the practices and outcomes, structures, systems, policies and pedagogies of this sector of education. Watch this space!

Endnotes

1 *Don't be too polite girls* is set to the tune of *All among the wool, boys*. Lyrics by Glen Tomasetti. The focus of the song is the struggle for equal pay.

2 There is a vast literature relating to women and work.

3 Because there is a time lag in the availability of VET figures (with currently available data relating to 1995 and 1996), the most recent labour force figures are not used here. February 1997 figures are used instead to facilitate comparison. Acknowledgement is accorded to Barb Kempnich, for her assistance in the compilation of these data.

4 Use with caution. Subject to high standard errors.

5 Commenting on similar problems observed when women began to enter a traditional male trade Eveline (1995) attributes this type of response to a fear of change:

> *Here it is the woman who is depicted as alien. The story is that there is no other way to place her except as the unknown, the invader, the dangerous, the unspeakable. Some of the women...speak of themselves as a being simply a 'race apart'. The men, on the other hand, are a leftover from the past since they haven't changed with the times. The concern, the threat, the danger is all about the spectre of change...* (p.5).

6 Tables in this section have been prepared by Barb Kempnich.

7 This analysis was conducted by Mike Long of ACER.

8 Paradoxically, this term has since become identified with the ACE sector.

9 Kangan was quiet on the issue of industry involvement except in course advisory committees (Schofield 1994) but stronger links were gradually established as training moved from industry to TAFE. Industry training colleges declined but joint developments between industry and TAFE resulted in the setting up of special skill centres (Kirby 1994).

10 The literature contains an interesting debate on the legacy of the Kangan vision. Like Rushbrook, some writers claim the NTRA broke with the Kangan vision. Schofield for instance maintains that it was necessary to do so to legitimise reform. On the other hand some writers indicate that many of the elements of training reform were already in place and in fact were only expanded in the reform process.

11 The evaluation reported progress on 21 national projects, with grants ranging from $10 000 to $157 000. (A total of $1.4 million). Overall it found that the projects had been efficient and effective and had enabled the achievement of some targets.

12 Legislative (complaints-based) mechanisms introduced in Australia, in the pursuit of equality through penalising discrimination include the following: the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Commonwealth); the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA); the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Commonwealth); the Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986 (Commonwealth); Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act 1986; the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Commonwealth). For insightful overviews of the (Commonwealth and State) legislative framework, as well as its relation with international conventions through United Nations and International Labour Organisation, refer to Burton (1991), Poiner and Wills (1991), and Walpole (1996), (Butler 1997a).

13 While acknowledging this attempt, what is disturbing is that, for women, whether in or out of work, the lists are identical, illustrating either a limited conceptual grasp of the issues, or the complexity.

14 See for example DETAFE 1997, *Training South Australia's future—1997 State training profile*, Appendix 4, Access & equity strategy, SA & the NSW State Plan of Action for Women in TAFE 1997–2000. However, such plans rely heavily on a strong base of support (including policies and resource commitment) at State level for equity in general and in this case women specifically. While this recognition of equity is most often located within public (TAFE) provision of VET, commitment within an increasingly deregulated market does not auger well for equity groups (for example, Courtenay & Mawer 1998).

15 Contrasting functionalist or positivist views of policy see it as generated and implemented in a straightforward and unproblematic way. These views are founded on a notion of society as underpinned by a value consensus and given stability by social institutions. Such functionalist approaches purport to apply scientific method to policy problems that are too complex to be answered in this way (Taylor et al. 1997).

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